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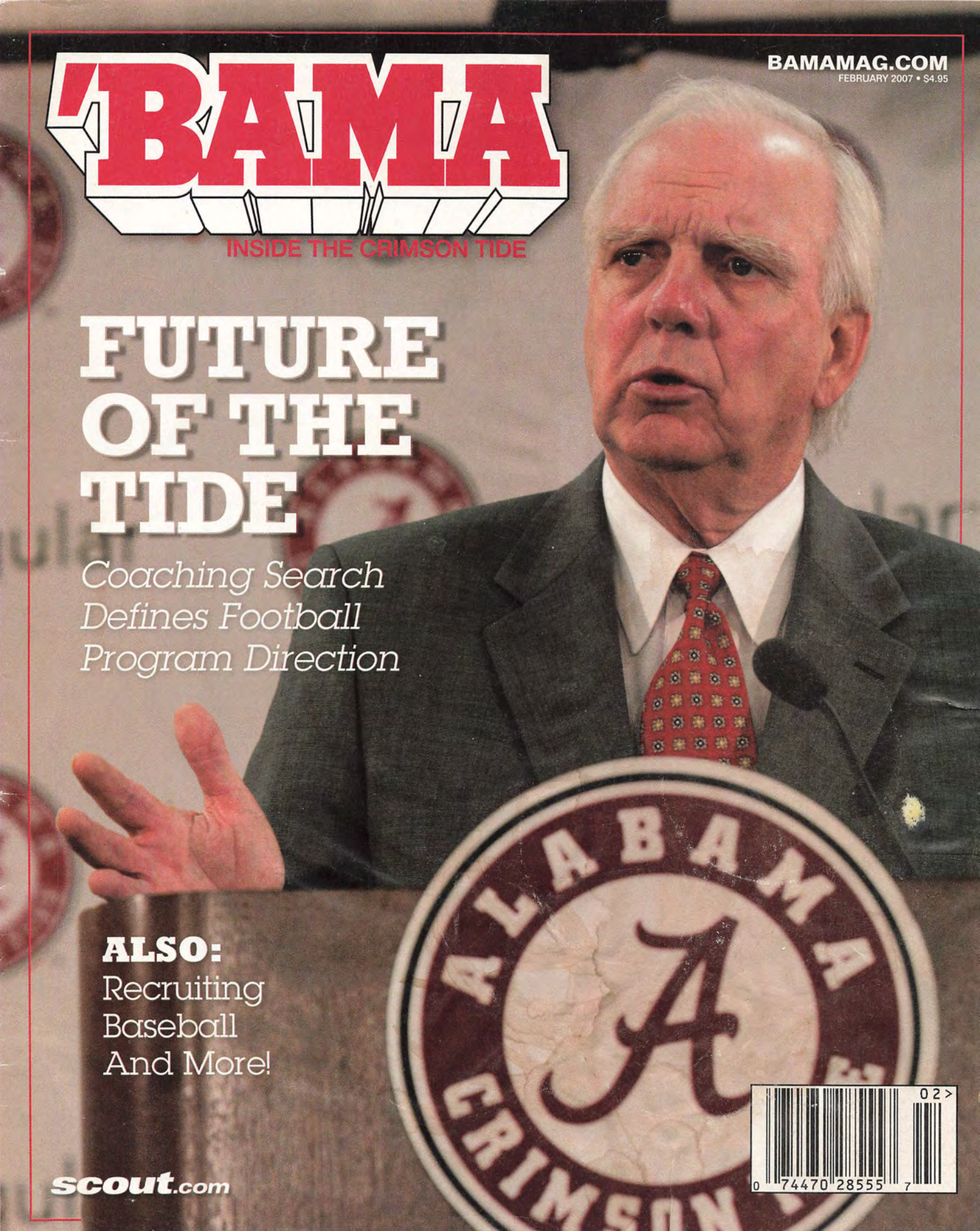

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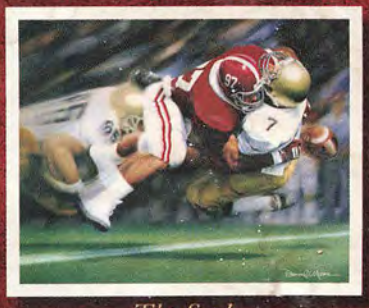

The Sack

The Kick

The Goal Line Stand

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Dear Fellow Crimson Tide Fans,

I am among the large number who have cursed the internet. Intruders into the world wide web take the liberty to say just about anything. It can be a chore–sometimes an impossible task–to separate truth from rumor or even truth from lie.

The internet is just a half step from talk radio, where falsehoods can be spread and cowardly attacks launched from the protection of anonymity. The line has even been crossed by many newspapers, which pander to the worst of us allowing unsigned opinion opportunities.

The most vitriolic postings are those taboos of polite company, politics and religion. And, at least in the South, football.

A handful of trusted Crimson Tide faithful voluntarily serve as monitors on the boards of BamaMag.com, our internet site. For the most part, we can control the quality of the site, though occasionally something nasty and/or inaccurate can have a few hours of life before it is deleted.

For all that is bad about the internet, it also serves a grand purpose.

Most of those participating do so with the best of intentions, enjoying the community of like-minded fans. Most of the information shared concerns recruiting and the like. There is also clarification about injuries and position changes, etc. Naturally, the latest adventures in "Searching for a Football Coach" resulted in much internet traffic.

Alabama fans (in the case of most on BamaMag.com) all have the same ultimate goal of Crimson Tide excellence. That doesn't mean there isn't disagreement. And sometimes it is disagreeable. For the most part, though, fans have the opportunity to discuss various ways of reaching the same end.

For the journalist, the internet can be heaven or hell.

The hell is the additional competitive arena, one that seems to lure otherwise competent reporters to disdain double checks and rely on questionable "sources." In his search for a new head football coach, Alabama Athletics Director Mal Moore said he was more interested in getting the right man than in speed. Oh, but had reporters held themselves to that standard: getting it right is better than getting it first.

The best thing about the internet for a journalist is that it offers escape from the cruelty of deadlines. Except in the most extreme situations deadlines are inflexible. The calendar and the clock move towards the deadline, determined and as stressful as the resoluteness of the prison guard escorting the condemned. For the newspaper reporter, the inability to have the news in today's paper will be remedied the following day.

Radio and television people have it a bit better. They can always interrupt regularly scheduled programming to bring you an important announcement. Then it's back to "Happy Days" re-runs, or whatever. They'll bring you the full story in a two-minute recap at the next scheduled news reading.

It's much tougher in the magazine business. You received your January issue of 'BAMA a few weeks after Mike Shula was dismissed as head coach. There wasn't a word about the dismissal in that magazine. That's because the copy deadline had passed even before the final game of the season. After we complete our writing, it is another few weeks before the magazine makes its way through the printer and the postal service.

And then we had to wait out the coaching search, hoping in vain Mal Moore would be able to give us a new Alabama football coach in time for us to have a cover photograph and story of the fifth Crimson Tide football coach of this millennium in this February issue, which had an early December deadline.

In any event, we have been able to cover the story in depth. That's because of the internet, where we also cover games and keep current in recruiting. On BamaMag.com, we are connected to our readers on a minute-by-minute basis. And that makes all that is bad about it worthwhile. ■

Sincerely,

Kirk McNair

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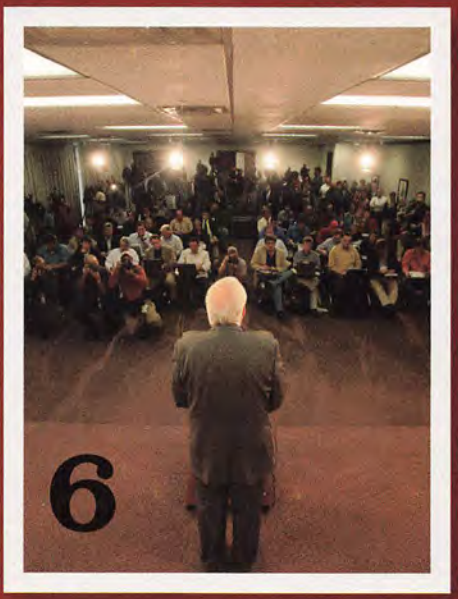

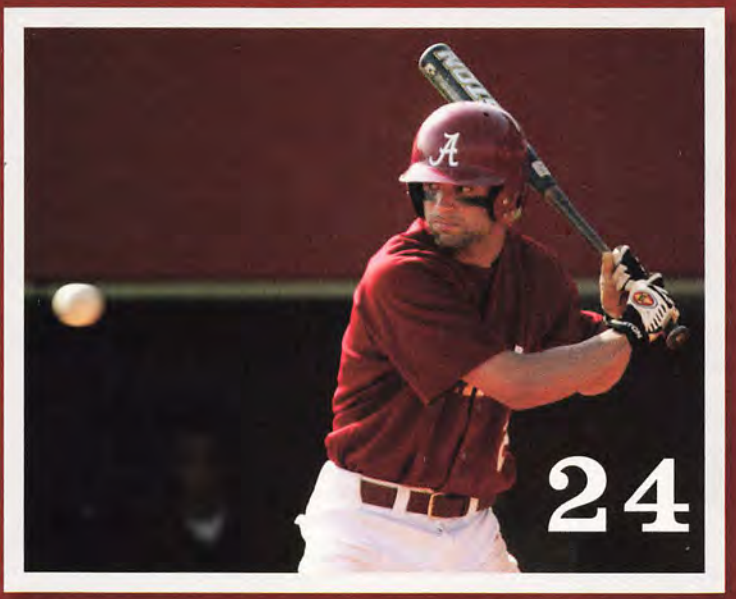

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Cover photo of Athletics Director Mal Moore by Kent Gidley

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BEST MAN

Alabama has deliberate search for new football coach

There was no shortage of suggestions for Alabama Athletics Director Mal Moore. Bama football fans managed to dredge up just about every name in the business to FAX, e-mail, call into talk radio shows, and post on internet message boards. Just about every name. No one mentioned Dennis Franchione or Mike Price.

Rich Rodriguez

Getty/Gregory Shamus

Or Rich Rodriguez, at least after Rodriguez backed out of a deal to take the Alabama job. On December 7 he and Bama had come to an agreement. On December 8, after returning to West Virginia ostensibly to tell his team goodbye, Rodriguez got the full court press from WVU, which suddenly could come up with all the Rodriguez demands it had been unable to meet earlier.

Though strictly conjecture, considering his background it is reasonable to suspect that Moore discussed thoroughly with Rodriguez the consequences of the deal. Moore would have told Rodriguez that West Virginia–Rodriguez's alma mater–would make a strong bid to keep their coach. And Moore would have said that if Rodriguez was not strong enough to stand up to it, to let Moore know before the offer was made.

Rodriguez did stand up to it and he did not call Moore to renege. He left that job to his agent.

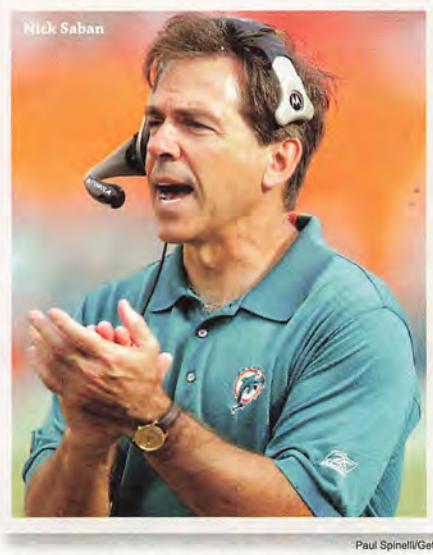
Just the mention of Alabama got substantial raises for several top coaches around the nation.

Thus, the bizarre search for the right man to be Alabama's head football coach continued.

There were even suggestions that septuagenarian Gene Stallings, who retired a decade ago, or Mike Shula be brought back. For different reasons, that would mean Alabama would be going through the same chore a year hence.

There could be reasons beyond West Virginia's new found largess for Rodriguez backing out. Unquestionably, the job of Alabama head football coach can prove daunting. For that reason, the Crimson Tide has to have a man who won't be daunted. Some think it is not a good job. Competent and confident coaches relish the opportunity.

In addition to the obvious, a salary in the neighborhood of 20 times the most legendary Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant ever made, the Alabama job is rife with advantages. There is no


Nick Saban

Paul Spinelli/Getty

great record to follow. A few setbacks could be blamed on Shula for not leaving enough football players. That would not be true, but it would serve as a handy excuse.

In fact, one of the great advantages of taking the Alabama job is that there are fine football players coming up. Some two-thirds of the 2006 team were freshmen and sophomores. Moreover, Bama is always a place to where good football players will be attracted, many of them from the excellent high school programs in the state. Detractors say that tradition doesn't matter, but that is true only where schools have little or no tradition.

Alabama has a magnificent Bryant-Denny Stadium, outstanding practice facilities, every amenity possible for coaches and players. The NCAA probation that decimated the program ends February 1.

The Alabama football coach lacks for nothing, the possible exception being patience. Expectations are high.

As surprising as the announcement of Rodriguez may have been, it is unlikely to have caught Moore completely unprepared. That doesn't take Moore off the hook. Bama followers

may not always be reasonable, but it is not unreasonable to expect the Crimson Tide to be able to identify a good football coach, obtain that good football coach, and retain that good football coach. Unusual circumstances notwithstanding, Moore's record is wanting in all three areas in this decade.

And Moore can't share the blame, because he serves as a search committee of one. He may seek the counsel of others, but it is his charge from the President of The University and the Board of Trustees to hire the head football coach. That Moore chooses to keep the process secret to the extent he can adds to the frustration of interested fans.

It is certain Moore had a contingency plan. This is not the first time Moore has been misled in a coaching search, and he would be prepared to move on.

There was a sense of panic among the Alabama faithful when Bama's first choice spurned the Tide, and that is understandable. Where there could not be panic was in the office of the athletics director of The University.

Rick Rodriguez is a fine coach. Fortunately for Alabama, he is not the only fine coach. Moore knew other good coaches before the deal with Rodriguez, and the Alabama AD would not have discarded that list. This is a fortuitous time to be coach searching because there are so many excellent possibilities in college and professional ranks.

Bama may or may not have approached Steve Spurrier, who regardless got a half million dollar a year raise as he pledged his loyalty to South Carolina. It is a challenge to fathom any football or financial reason why Spurrier would prefer to be the football coach at South Carolina instead of Alabama.

Among the hot names connected with the Tide were Paul Johnson of Navy, also slated for a nice raise, and Jim Grobe of Wake Forest, likewise expected to get a salary boost. (What do the admirals think about the football coach in Annapolis making $1.8 million?) Greg Schiano rose to prominence after his Rutgers team defeated Bobby Petrino's Louisville squad in a late-season showdown of undefeated teams. It is a modern wonder that outstanding coaches might surface from the likes of a Rutgers or Louisville.

Men with seemingly no connection to Alabama made various lists, outstanding coaches such as Jeff Tedford of California and Steve Kragthorpe of Tulsa.

Many believe Moore's number one prospect was Nick Saban of the Miami Dolphins. Among football people, few would rank higher as a head coach and recruiter.

Moore said from the beginning, and reiterated after the Rodriguez fiasco, that he was much more concerned with getting the best man than he was with finishing the search quickly. No matter who was chosen for the job, he is going to be considered second tier by those who despise The University–fans of other schools and a handful of media members. That is of no concern to Alabama. Those will always have an agenda against the Crimson Tide.

In a statement released after Rodriguez's decision, Moore said, "I want to remind everyone of what I said at the outset of this process. My only objective is to get the best person available to lead the Alabama football program. I remain determined to bring to our program a proven

Mal Moore announces Mike Shula's firing and discusses football coach search with media

University of Alabama

head coach with impressive credentials.

"While I am hoping to conclude the search soon, following a timeline is not my main priority. Hiring an outstanding head coach to lead our players is the most important thing, and that will continue to be my only objective."

To his credit, Rodriguez said, "I can't say anything but good things about Alabama. Everything they did was first class." He said he was staying because of reasons to stay "as opposed to reasons not to go. There are no reasons not to go. I want to make that clear."

Moore had no reason to believe he would not have a satisfactory result. A home run? The perception is immediate. The reality comes later, dependent on Bama's success in returning to championship level.

Meanwhile, to their credit, the staff of Mike Shula, under Interim Head Coach Joe Kines, did their work well, preparing the Crimson Tide football team for the Independence Bowl and continuing to reassure prospects that Alabama's football future is a good one. ■

Joe Kines served as interim head coach.

University of Alabama

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TRANSITION

Mal Moore believed football was not progressing

Mike Shula was 23-26 as Crimson Tide's Head Coach

University of Alabama

Mike Shula walked out of the team meeting thinking his program was moving in the right direction. Instead, with each step he took he was moving closer to his firing.

A spark of activity a few hours later set reporters ablaze on the Sunday night after Thanksgiving. Shortly after midnight Birmingham's ABC 33/40 television broke into programming to report Mike Shula had been dismissed from his duties as head coach of the Crimson Tide football team.

Crimson Tide quarterback John Parker Wilson already knew. He got a call from his offensive coordinator, Dave Rader, who delivered the news. Word leaked rapidly through media circles while most people slept. Most players found out when they woke up.

"I had that feeling that something was going to happen; I just didn't know what," defensive end Wallace Gilberry said. "I was definitely surprised by the fact that we don't have Coach Shula anymore."

Some other players weren't so lucky to hear the news from someone so close to the program. A television camera ambushed senior linebacker Terrence Jones Monday as he entered the Mal Moore Athletics Building. At first he thought it was a joke. The camera rolled as the seriousness of the situation seeped into his consciousness. Jones stood speechless. Center Antoine Caldwell found out from a reporter, too.

"I came out here for a workout at 6:30 a.m. and had a reporter ask me about it," Caldwell said. "I went outside and had a couple of teammates tell me what happened. The reality sunk in that all the rumors had been true."

Only hours earlier, at nine o'clock Sunday evening, Shula stood before his team and told them not to believe the rumors that he would be fired. He was their head coach. Reporters staked out the Sunday night meeting at the Bryant Hall academic center only to see that nothing out of the ordinary had taken place. Players emerged from the 15-minute meeting (which was standard procedure to ensure everyone had returned safely from holiday travels) flipping open cell phones and spreading word across the state and beyond that the meeting produced no news, and no suspicious foreshadowing of what would come later.

But unbeknownst to the players, a member of the football staff had delivered to Shula a message to report to Mal Moore's house immediately after the meeting. The decision to fire Shula was finalized earlier Sunday afternoon, when Moore met with University President Robert Witt, Chancellor Malcolm Portera and select members of the Board of Trustees. Several University of Alabama officials have privately maintained Moore tried unsuccessfully to reach Shula by telephone between then and the meeting that night. Hence, the unfortunate and untimely manner by which the news was delivered to the players. The University made it official Monday morning, November 27.

Shula apparently never saw it coming, saying in his statement, "When we met Sunday night, I fully believed that I was going to remain the head coach at The University. I apologize that you (the players) did not learn about my firing from me."

Wilson, the quarterback who emerged as a wonderful player in spite of the team's failures, read Shula's statement silently to himself on Monday, rubbing his right cheekbone with his index finger, deftly choking back emotion while dozens of reporters huddled around waiting quietly for his response.

"I don't think he has anything to apologize to us for," Wilson said. "(Shula and I) were pretty close and I had a really good relationship with him."

But it wasn't the first time Shula had been caught off-guard. In a narrative published by the Birmingham News, gathered largely from sources close to the dismissed coach, Shula reportedly thought the Sunday night meeting with Moore was to present his plan for recovery to Moore.

There had been a brief meeting between Shula and Moore on Monday the week prior, and a lengthier one the day after. Moore, who is the boss after all, viewed the Tuesday meeting as Shula's last pitch on making necessary adjustments to steer the program back on course and therefore keep his job. It included, according to independent reporting by both BamaMag.com and he Tuscaloosa News, only surface changes: retaining the entire staff and shuffling assignments among members of the current staff. Shula's read on that meeting, however, was that it "was more philosophical in nature."

And while Shula might have thought that Tuesday meeting was the mere beginning of a negotiation on a way forward with him as the head coach, it was in reality the beginning of the end.

Shula's side also said, after the fact of his firing, that he had spent the long Thanksgiving holiday weekend calling other coaches for advice, and was "ready and willing to meet with anybody at any time" according to his attorney, Mike Rodgers.

Moore's hand had apparently been forced by then, and Shula had been in dangerous waters for much longer than he had known. Moore indicated the questioning of the fundamental direction of the program began mid-season (presumably at halftime of the sixth game when Alabama trailed a winless Duke squad 14-10).

After losing to Tennessee two weeks later Tuscaloosa News Sports Editor Cecil Hurt wrote a scathing column, suggesting that it was time for Shula to junk, or at least hire someone to fix, an offense he wrote was "broken." Shula refused to consider whether or not his offense was "fundamentally flawed" when asked to respond to the criticism the following week. Alabama's loss to Mississippi State, coached by Sylvester Croom, the runner-up to Shula for the Alabama job when Shula took it, was back-breaking in terms of maintaining a solid base of support.

Moore observed practice the Tuesday before Alabama played LSU in Baton Rouge and spoke with Shula on the practice field for about half an hour. No reports of what exactly transpired in that conversation have surfaced, but Shula put some imagination on display from the offense (John Parker Wilson hit Kenneth Darby on a wheel route rolling out right and throwing back left for a touchdown) and there was some chance-taking with special teams, first with a surprise onside kick and then with a fake punt attempt. Still, the offense could not eclipse the two-touchdown plateau it has maintained in SEC games dating back to the Alabama-Florida game in 2005. Alabama's 22-15 loss to an injury-plagued Auburn team in Bryant-Denny Stadium, Shula's fourth loss to Auburn, did nothing to stem the tide of negative circumstances which led to his firing.

The Shula camp said he was ready to make real changes, including replacing members of his coaching staff. But in the written statement following his dismissal, Shula made it clear that significant change was not something he felt necessary. Instead, he maintained that the program under his leadership was "moving steadily in that direction" of returning Alabama to an elite status.

Despite some unseemly aspects of the ending, of which some were probably inevitable, there was respect and gratitude exchanged the day after that final meeting at Moore's home.

"Mike and his staff took over our program during a trying period four years ago, and in a number of ways Mike has been an excellent representative of our program," Moore said. "He personally has displayed impeccable character. As both a player and a head coach, Mike has made tremendous contributions to our program and we always will be grateful for his efforts."

Moore stated his disagreement with one of Shula's basic tenets, however, saying, "We did not make progress on the field this season and have not been able to maintain the positive momentum necessary to return Alabama football to a place among college football's elite programs."

Shula's statement expressed the obvious disappointment over being fired, and thanked his coaching staff, players and the public who supported him. It did not mention Moore or Witt, who hired him three and a half years ago.

"Despite inherited restrictions, including probation and scholarship limits, our teams played with integrity and commanded respect," he said. "Our 10-2 record in 2005 was no fluke; it was evidence of a program on the rise. Although the past season was not as fulfilling, it was nevertheless a season that witnessed the emergence of several young players who will help the Crimson Tide win big in the years to come."

He defended his performance, and attempted to protect his legacy in history. In the part of the statement addressed to his players, Shula said, "Do not let the circumstances of my firing allow you to lose your focus. Do not let this transition rob you of your potential for greatness. Together with the talented recruits who have committed to join the Tide next year, I am fully confident that the pieces are in place for you to accomplish great things."

Witt said in a statement, "I want to thank Mike Shula for his commitment to The University of Alabama football program. His leadership has provided our program with much-needed stability during the past four years, and we appreciate that, as our coach, he has demonstrated impeccable character and class in every way.

It was the communication breakdown at a very basic level that seemed behind many of the misgivings so many Alabama football fans, and ultimately the athletics department's decision makers, had during Shula's reign. He brought the Crimson Tide forward through probation and a set of embarrassing coaching departures before his team stalled and confidence in him dissipated. For that, and for his lone winning season, he received a sizable raise and a $4 million sum buyout which Moore insisted would be carried out "to the letter."

Defensive coordinator Joe Kines assumed the role of interim head coach, and on the Saturday following his dismissal, the Crimson Tide football team hit the field with a renewed intensity–trying to move forward once again. ■

Moving On

There is other Crimson Tide football news

Although it may not have seemed like it during the frenzy of the search to replace Mike Shula as head coach, Alabama will continue to have a football team. There is no news bigger than the change of a head football coach (and resulting staff changes). Moreover, this is the height of football recruiting. There was also the Independence Bowl game.

And at Alabama, there is always some football news, even though not as dramatic as events immediately following the 2006 regular season.

Prior to the coaching change, 2007 spring training dates had been established. Although it is possible the dates might be adjusted, the original plan was to spread the 15 days of work around spring break at The University, meaning a total period of about five weeks from start to finish.

Spring football practice had been scheduled to begin February 22 and conclude with the A-Day Game at Bryant-Denny Stadium on March 31. Spring break is March 9-16.

Barnes Out

At least one Alabama player will miss spring practice after having suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee during practice for the Independence Bowl game against Oklahoma State.

Back-up quarterback Jimmy Barnes was injured in a non-contact practice on December 2. The resulting surgery was expected to sideline him for four to six months. A statement from The University said "He should be fully recovered in time for fall camp next August."

Barnes, who will be a sophomore in eligibility, played in two games last season and completed 6 of 11 passes for 45 yards and one touchdown.

In his absence, redshirt freshman Greg McElroy will get valuable work with returning starter John Parker Wilson.

All-Star Participation

Although it was pointed out that Alabama will almost certainly have a new scheme and terminology with a new head coach next season, the bowl practices were nevertheless important. Interim Head Coach Joe Kines made good use of those practice sessions, working on fundamentals "every day, right up through Shreveport."

Although Bama may have new schemes next year, practice on fundamentals–tackling, blocking, passing, catching, kicking, etc.–should be beneficial.

The 2006 Independence Bowl was not expected to be the last college football for 11 Alabama football seniors, who had been invited to participate in post-season college all-star games.

The Crimson Tide was to be represented in the Senior Bowl, East-West Shrine Game, the Hula Bowl and the inaugural Inta Juice North-South All-Star Classic during the month of January.

Alabama was to be represented by four seniors in the inaugural Inta Juice North-South All-Star Classic on January 13 at Galena Park ISD Stadium in Houston, Texas. They were defensive end Chris Harris (Tuscaloosa), linebacker Terrence Jones (Fosters), defensive tackle Dominic Lee (Birmingham) and offensive lineman Kyle Tatum (Prattville).

Three more Crimson Tide players were to showcase their talents on the island of Oahu at the 2007 Hula Bowl, played on Sunday, January 14, 2007 at Aloha Stadium in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Fullback Tim Castille (Birmingham) and defensive backs Jeffrey Dukes (Oxford, Mississippi) and Ramzee Robinson (Huntsville) were to participate in this year's classic.

Defensive lineman Jeremy Clark (Daphne) is the Tide's lone representative expected to play in the annual East-West Shrine game played Saturday, January 20, 2007 at Reliant Stadium in Houston Texas.

The Senior Bowl, which wraps up the all-star scene, was to be played Saturday, January 27 at Ladd-Peeples Stadium in Mobile. The Senior Bowl extended invitations to running back Kenneth Darby (Huntsville), fullback LéRon McClain (Tuscaloosa), and linebacker Juwan Simpson (Decatur).

All-Stars

As would be expected in a mediocre season, the 2006 Crimson Tide had only a handful of all-star honorees. Junior cornerback Simeon Castille (Birmingham) was first team All-Southeastern Conference in teams selected both by the Associated Press and by the coaches of the SEC.

Castille started all 12 regular season games (sometimes as a cornerback and sometimes as the nickel back as Bama spent most of 2006 in a 3-4 defensive scheme) and ranked fourth on the team with 65 tackles, including a team-best 43 solo stops. Castille was responsible for eight turnovers this season as he led the Crimson Tide with five interceptions and three fumbles recovered. The eight turnovers forced and five interceptions were also among the SEC leaders.

Center Antoine Caldwell (Montgomery) and wide receiver D.J. Hall (Pensacola, Florida) were both second team All-SEC.

Caldwell, who switched from starting as a guard in a Freshman All-SEC season in 2005, started all 12 regular season games at center. He played 746 total snaps, the second-most of any offensive player and fourth most on the team, and also played at left guard and right tackle in special situations. Caldwell was second among UA's offensive lineman with 58 knockdown blocks, including a season best eight against Louisiana Monroe and Florida.

Hall is one of the nation's premier receivers. In 11 regular season games, he caught 57 passes for an Alabama single-season record 1,014 yards and five touchdowns. Hall and David Palmer are the only two UA receivers with 1,000 or more yards in a season. Palmer had exactly 1,000 yards in 1993. In addition, Hall set Alabama records this season for most career 100-yard games (11), most 100-yard games in a season (7) and most consecutive 100-yard games (5).

Four Alabama freshmen received recognition on Freshman All-SEC teams, including redshirt freshman middle linebacker Prince Hall (Moreno Valley, California) being named the SEC Freshman

Defensive Player of the Year by The Sporting News.

Also earning Freshman All-SEC honors were offensive left tackle Andre Smith (Birmingham), punter P.J. Fitzgerald (Coral Springs, Florida), and return specialist Javier Arenas (Tampa, Florida).

Smith started all 12 games at left tackle this season and led the Crimson Tide with 800 total snaps and 62 knockdowns. He became the seventh true freshman in school history to start the season opener when he took the field on September 2 against Hawaii.

Fitzgerald averaged 38.5 yards per kick in 12 games this season. He dropped 18 punts inside the 20 yard line. He also served as the Crimson Tide's holder on extra point attempts and field goals.

Arenas led Alabama in both punt returns and kickoff returns. He had 27 punt returns for 179 yards, a 6.6 yard average, and had a 68-yard return for a touchdown. He had 18 kickoff returns for 354 yards, a 19.7 average.

High Marks

In addition to D.J. Hall, Alabama had another record-setting performer in 2006. First-year starting quarterback John Parker Wilson of Birmingham passed for a school record 2,539 yards and 16 touchdowns in 12 regular season games. He also set an Alabama record with seven straight 200-yard games to start the year and nine 200-yard games for the season.

There is no lack of interest in Alabama football. Although most Crimson Tide football games are televised on network or cable television, it seems there is nothing like being there in person. Expanded and remodeled Bryant-Denny Stadium had a perfect record in 2006. Eight games, eight sellouts.

Alabama ranked fifth in the nation in attendance with Bama averaging 92,138 fans for each game. And, in fact, Alabama announced attendance of exactly 92,138–which is capacity–for each of those games. The Tide had total attendance of 737,104, trailing Michigan (770,183), Penn State (752,972), Tennessee (740,521), and LSU (737,696). Michigan, Penn State and Tennessee all reported excess of 100 per cent capacity. Those three teams also had only seven home games.

Looking Ahead

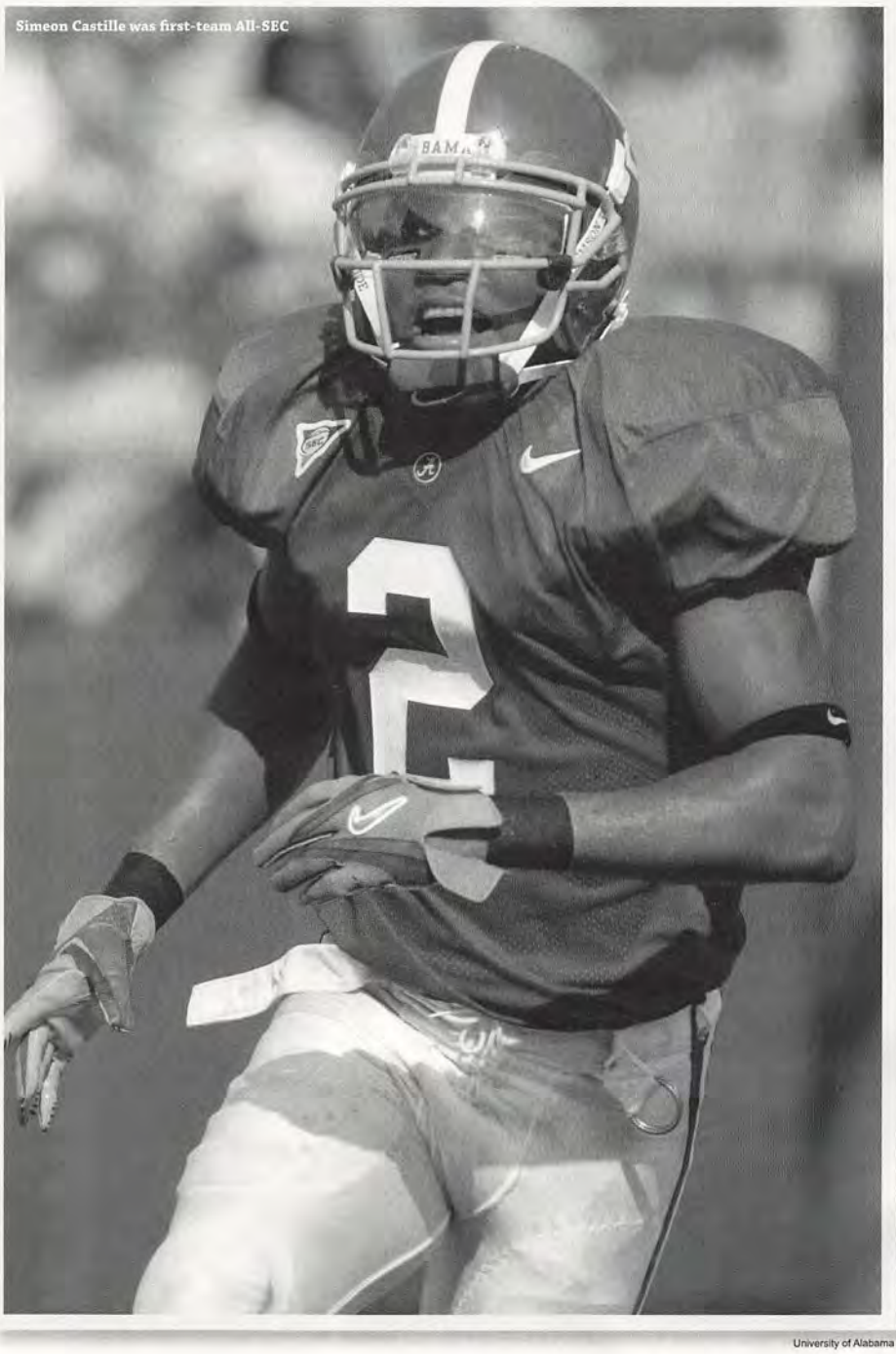
Alabama will continue to be a relatively young team in 2007 since approximately two-thirds of the 2006 squad was made up of freshmen (true freshmen and redshirt freshmen) and sophomores.

Although the depth chart could change, based on the way Bama finished the 2006 season the Crimson Tide will return nine starters on offense and six on defense and all kicking team specialists–punter, placekicker, snapper, and return man.

Bama loses its starting tailback, Kenneth Darby, and starting fullback, LéRon McClain. Returning starters on offense are quarterback John Parker Wilson, wide receivers D.J. Hall and Keith Brown, tight end Travis McCall, tackles Andre Smith and Chris Capps, guards Justin Britt and Marlon Davis or B.J. Stabler, and center Antoine Caldwell.

On defense, the Tide loses tackles Jeremy Clark and Dominic Lee, outside linebackers Juwan Simpson and Terrence Jones, cornerback Ramzee Robinson, and strong safety Jeffrey Dukes. Returning are ends Wallace Gilberry and Keith Saunders or Bobby Greenwood, middle linebacker Prince Hall, cornerback Simeon Castille, and safety Marcus Carter or Rashad Johnson.

Placekicker Jamie Christensen, punter P.J. Fitzgerald, snapper Luke Spaulding, and return man Javier Arenas are back. ■



Simeon Castille was first-team All-SEC

University of Alabama

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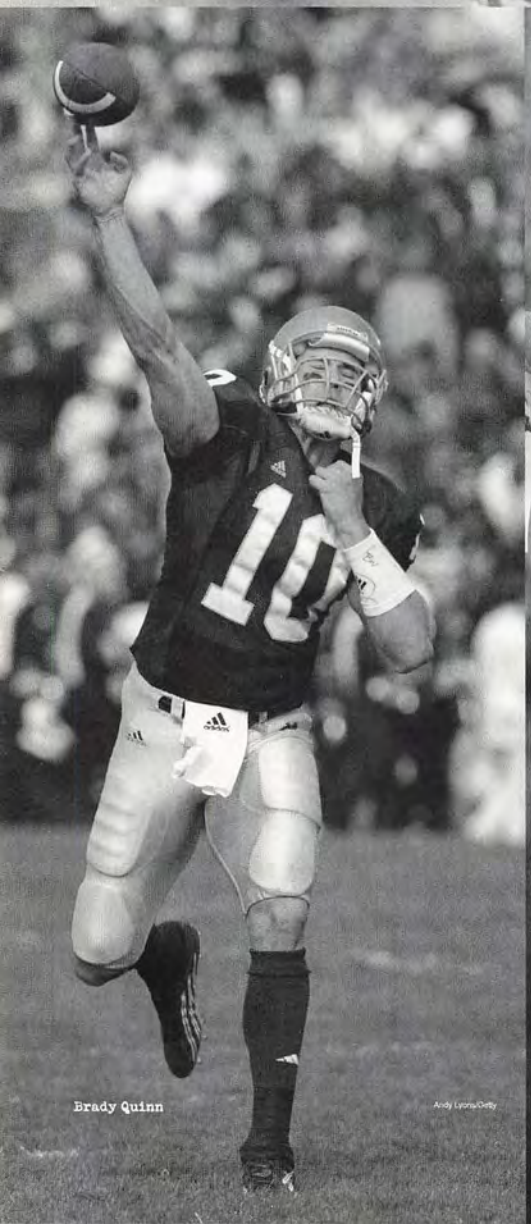
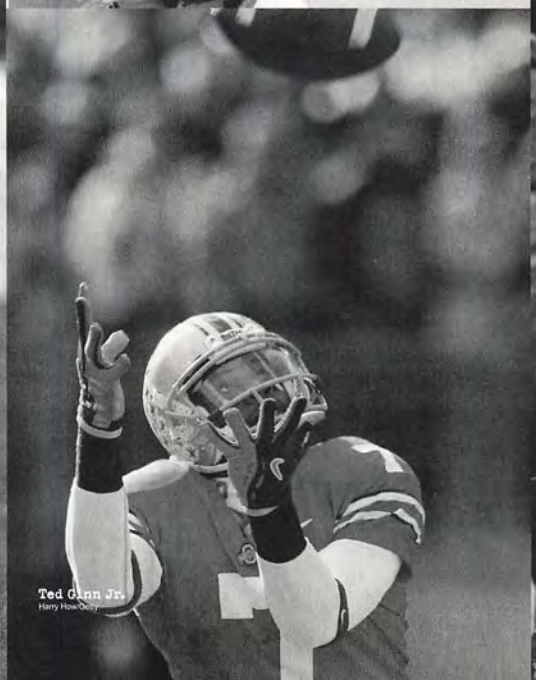
Adrian Peterson
Jonathan Ferrey/Getty

LaMarr Woodley
Jonathan Daniel/Getty



Brady Quinn
Andy Lyons/Getty

Brian Brohm
Andy Lyons/Getty



Ted Ginn Jr.
Harry How/Getty

Marshawn Lynch
Jonathan Ferrey/Getty

Calvin Johnson

Scott Halleran/Getty

by Tony Pauline, Scout.com

THE EARLY EDITION: PROSPECT PROGNOSTICATIONS

With another exciting season of college football in the books, a look at a bunch of standouts who figure to be top NFL Draft picks

Scouting for the NFL draft is a 12-month process. Barely seven months ago, many observers were shocked when the Houston Texans selected Mario Williams over the highly-rated Reggie Bush with the draft's first pick. And while that memory is still fresh in everyone's mind, the 2007 draft will soon be upon us. Here's a preview of the top players at each position who will impact next April's selection process.

Quarterbacks

Originally a position that had plenty of promise, the top-rated quarterbacks have been disappointing this season. Despite that, nearly a half-dozen draft-eligible signal callers carry first-day grades.

Brady Quinn/Notre Dame—A strong-armed pocket passer with the physical dimensions to be a starter at the next level, Quinn has the tools to lead a franchise on the NFL level. Yet Quinn has not met expectations this season, nor has he taken his game to the next level. Still, Quinn's talent at a priority position will make him a top-six selection.

Brian Brohm/Louisville—Possessing an NFL-caliber arm, Brohm offers outstanding upside potential. Still rough around the edges in many aspects of the position, injuries have been a problem for the Cardinal signal caller. He's only a junior, but Brohm could be selected in the first dozen picks if he enters the draft.

Troy Smith/Ohio State—An outstanding athlete, Smith is in the midst of a tremendous senior campaign and soaring up draft boards. While transforming into a complete quarterback, he has improved his accuracy and decision-making. His play this year could help Smith get consideration in the late part of round one.

Drew Stanton / Michigan State—Another passer with terrific size, Stanton offers the ability to be used in several offensive systems at the next level. He shows a good understanding of the game, but his play has been disappointing this season. As a result, this one-time potential top-15 pick is likely to land in the latter part of round one.

Seniors **Trent Edwards** of Stanford, **John Beck** of BYU and Houston's **Kevin Kolb**, along with LSU junior **JaMarcus Russell**, are four more passers to follow.

Streeter Lecka/Getty

Running Backs/Fullbacks

As has been case in the past, the running back position will be driven by underclassmen in April. There is plenty of depth from the senior crop of ball carriers, though very few are potential NFL starters.

Adrian Peterson/Oklahoma—An exceptional combination of size, speed and football instincts, Peterson is a complete back. Rarely brought down by the first defender, Peterson picks up yardage off initial contact, yet also makes defenders miss in the open field. Injuries have slowed his game, and Peterson was lost for the season after breaking his collarbone in October. He is still expected to enter April's draft, and he is still worthy of being a top-five selection.

MarshawnLynch/California—Another explosive ball carrier, Lynch also displays both power and speed carrying the ball. Effective as a pass catcher out of the backfield, Lynch possesses a lot of upside potential and will be selected during the first half of round one if he leaves for the NFL at the season's completion.

Kenny Irons/Auburn—He is always improving on the football field, and Irons is slowly developing into a complete ball carrier. Displaying outstanding quickness and speed, Irons beats defenders around the corner or squirms through the small creases on the inside. He is suffering through an injury-riddled senior season, but Irons fits into the late part of round one.

Tony Hunt/Penn State—A ball carrier on the rise, Hunt is watching his draft stock go through the roof. He is an intelligent runner and works hard in all aspects of the game. While he does not possess great speed, he offers enough skill to be a feature running back at the next level.

Michael Bush/Louisville—A strong and powerful running back, Bush is a complete ball carrier with the ability to run around defenders as well as run over them. The highly-rated senior suffered a broken leg during the first game of the season and now must decide whether to return for one more year on the college field or take his game to the NFL.

Brian Leonard/Rutgers—A multi-dimensional fullback, Leonard is a triple-threat player who beats opponents carrying the ball, catching the ball out of the backfield or devastating them as a lead blocker. He possesses first-round talent but plays fullback, a position teams rarely draft until the third round.

Several highly-rated seniors, such as Florida State's **Lorenzo Booker**, **Ken Darby** of Alabama and **Tyrone Moss** from Miami, are dropping down draft boards as a result of poor play this year, yet all three are talented football players who could be steals in the middle rounds.

Wide Receivers/Tight Ends

While the senior class of receivers is thin at the top, it offers plenty of depth. Two underclassmen stand head and shoulders above everyone else at the wideout position. In similar fashion, a junior leads the way at tight end with upperclassmen trailing far behind.

Zach Miller

Sam Baker

Arron Sears

THE EARLY EDITION: PROSPECT PROGNOSTICATIONS

Calvin Johnson/Georgia Tech—Impacting the Georgia Tech offense from the day he stepped on the field, Johnson is a game-breaking and game-controlling pass catcher. He is reliable in all aspects of the game and a big-time talent who could be the first pick of the draft.

Ted Ginn Jr./Ohio State—Possessing home run-hitting speed, Ginn is a game-impacting player at receiver or as a return specialist. He is a top athlete who is developing a complete game. He has opponents playing back on their heels every time he lines up. He's only a junior, but he's likely to enter the draft and should be a top-15 choice.

Jeff Samardzija/Notre Dame—A prototypical possession receiver, Samardzija is a consistent wideout who comes through during the game's important moments. He is a terrific athlete who also has a future as a major-league baseball player, but Samardzija will be a first-round pick if he chooses the gridiron as a career.

Dwayne Jarrett/USC—A nice-sized wideout with solid hands, Jarrett has been productive in the Trojans' pro-style passing game the past three years. He lacks great foot speed, and he is best as an intermediate-range target in underneath coverage. A solid No. 2 receiver on the NFL level, the USC junior could sneak into the latter part of round one if he opts for the draft.

Zach Miller/Arizona State—Miller is drawing comparisons to former Sun Devil Todd Heap and is clearly the nation's top tight end. He consistently makes plays in the secondary and is an outstanding pass catcher. He is another junior expected to enter the draft, and he is likely a top-20 choice.

Joe Newton/Oregon State—One of the nation's most complete tight ends, Newton stands out as a pass catcher as well as a blocker. Sitting out last season with a foot injury, Newton has exceeded expectations upon his return and is moving up draft boards.

Several additional senior receivers carry first-day grades, including **Jason Hill** of Washington State, **Paul Williams** of Fresno State and **Dwayne Bowe** from LSU. Iowa's **Scott Chandler**, **Clark Harris** of Rutgers and Delaware's **Ben Patrick** are tight ends who will end up in the middle rounds.

Offensive Linemen

Offensive tackle is a priority position come draft time. Much to the delight of general managers and coaches, plenty of talented prospects will be available next April. Several players have the versatility to be used at either tackle or guard. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the center position that has limited quality and even less depth.

Joe Thomas/Wisconsin—NFL scouts rave about Thomas' ability as an exceptional pass protector. He plays with great fundamentals and shows terrific footwork and lateral blocking range. His potential as a blindside protector in the NFL will make Thomas one of the top five selections in next April's draft.

Sam Baker/USC—Outstanding at the left tackle spot since his freshman season at USC, Baker has the skills to immediately start in the NFL. He is another outstanding pass protector and is improving as a run blocker. Currently only a junior, Baker will be one of the first 10 players selected in April's draft if he leaves for the NFL after the season.

Jake Long/Michigan—A powerful blocker at the point of attack, Long is having a sensational campaign after struggling with injuries last year. He has outstanding size and shows solid footwork for a large lineman who dominates as both a run blocker and pass protector. Another highly-rated junior, he projects as a top-15 pick in April's draft.

Justin Blalock/Texas—A dominant right tackle at Texas the past three seasons, Blalock has effectively handled the guard position, too, as a senior this year. Possessing a powerful build, Blalock turns opponents off the line of scrimmage and is very efficient protecting the passer. While scouts are split on what his ultimate NFL position will be, there is no questioning Blalock is first-round material.

Arron Sears/Tennessee—Another offensive lineman who can be used at several different blocking spots, Sears has effectively played every position along the offensive line except center during his college career. He is strong at the point of attack and keeps defenders from the action. Being consistent the past three seasons, Sears could slide into the very late part of round one.

Levi Brown/Penn State—Another good-sized blocker at left tackle, Brown has been an effective lineman since his sophomore campaign. An intelligent lineman, he uses all his assets to a maximum. He has struggled with a knee injury this year, and therefore Brown has watched his draft grade slip into the second round.

Josh Beekman/Boston College—One of the few offensive guards to hold a first-day grade, Beekman has impressed scouts by also showing the ability to play center this year. A blocker who plays with a nasty attitude, Beekman turns defenders off the line and annihilates linebackers on the second level. He possesses a good amount of potential, so he should eventually develop into a starter on the NFL level.

Leroy Harris/North Carolina State—The top-rated center in the nation, Harris is a dominant blocker best in a small area. A wide-bodied lineman who opens holes for the running game, Harris is disciplined and stays with assignments. He could slide into the late part of the draft's first day and move into a starting lineup in the NFL sometime during his rookie season.

Defensive Linemen

Coming into the season, NFL scouts were excited about the crop of pass-rushing defensive ends who would be available in April's draft. Yet the expectations were not high for

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Quentin Moses

Paul Posluszny

Leon Hall

the group of defensive tackles who would be available. Unfortunately, both positions have been a disappointment this year.

Gaines Adams/Clemson—An elite athlete who impacts the game in a variety of ways, Adams is an explosive defender who terrorizes opposing quarterbacks. The knock on his game is a lack of intensity and a motor that is occasionally "off." Adams' physical skills warrant a top-six selection, but his character will be studied under a microscope.

Quentin Moses/Georgia—He was one of the highest-rated seniors coming into the season and Moses has been a game-disrupting pass rusher. He is fast off the edge and easily exploits tackles with his athleticism and quickness. Originally considered a potential top-five selection, Moses is in the middle of a terrible senior campaign and could drop out of the initial 10 picks.

Alan Branch/Michigan—With a void of talent at the defensive tackle position, Branch sits head and shoulders above the rest. Possessing outstanding size, the junior commands double teams in the middle of the field but still pushes the pocket and creates headaches. Only a junior, Branch will be selected during the draft's first dozen choices if he declares himself eligible.

LaMarr Woodley/Michigan—On the heels of a tremendous senior campaign, Woodley is watching his draft stock rise dramatically. He can line up in a three-point stance or occasionally standing up over tackle, making him another Wolverine defender who causes nightmares for opponents. Projected by some as a rush linebacker at the next level, Woodley is likely to be selected late in round one.

Frank Okam/Texas—Another junior defensive tackle who carries a first-round grade, Okam is a gigantic lineman with tremendous upside. He commands double- and triple-teams, and his ability to clog the middle of the field will be sought out next April.

Justin Harrell/Tennessee—Explosive in the middle of the field, Harrell has been productive for the Tennessee Volunteers the past three seasons. Consistently beating blockers off the ball, he also is an effective pass rusher with the ability to be used in different defensive systems. A torn biceps muscle in September ended his season, but Harrell is a prospect with a good amount of upside potential and could slide into the late part of round one.

Linebackers

As is the case with most NFL drafts, the available talent at middle linebacker next April will be thin. However, the prospects at the outside linebacker position offer a lot of potential, and several could find their way into the first 45 selections.

Paul Posluszny/Penn State—Everyone's All-America linebacker, Posluszny has been very productive at Penn State. With tremendous instincts, he consistently puts himself in a position to make plays. He lacks top size/speed numbers and he is not as good as his headlines would lend one to believe, but he still offers starting potential in a number of defensive systems at the next level.

Patrick Willis/Mississippi—An ultra-productive defender, Willis is becoming a multi-dimensional linebacker and top NFL prospect. He is consistently around the ball and makes plays against the run or in pass coverage. Likely to get consideration in the late part of round one, Willis has starting abilities at both middle and inside linebacker.

Keith Rivers/USC—One of the most underrated prospects in the nation, Rivers creates a lot of havoc on the outside for the Trojans while possessing outstanding speed and the ability to make plays sideline to sideline. Rivers flies around the action and makes positive plays. A junior with great upside, he is another who could slide into the late part of the draft's first round.

Buster Davis/Florida State—An undersized linebacker in the mold of players such as Ray Lewis and Jonathan Vilma, Davis is a ferocious defender rising up draft boards. He combines intelligence, quickness and speed to get the job done while sacrificing his body to make the tackle. Davis will be a productive NFL defender if placed in the proper NFL system.

Defensive Backs

The available talent at the cornerback position next April will be deep, as top prospects are exceeding expectations. The same cannot be said for safety, where a number of highly-rated prospects are slogging through disappointing campaigns.

Leon Hall/Michigan—An outstanding cover man who's shown improvement in every aspect of his game, Hall is moving up draft boards. He is consistently forcing quarterbacks to throw away from him, as he displays top ball skills and possesses great hands for the interception. Also strong defending the run, he is a potential top-10 selection next April.

Darryl Revis/Pittsburgh—Another shutdown cornerback, Revis is an impressive junior with outstanding upside potential. Possessing terrific ball skills, he also offers outstanding size/speed numbers. A junior who has made his NFL intentions known, expect Revis to be a top-20 choice next April.

Marcus McCauley/Fresno State—Quite possibly the best athlete of all the cornerbacks in next April's draft, McCauley is a cover man with great skill. He has the size to match up with opponents and he rarely gets beat, making him a first-round projection.

Laron Landry/LSU—One of the most complete safeties to come around in a long time, Landry is a hard-hitting run defender who possesses outstanding skills in coverage. Landry does an excellent job diagnosing the action and is always willing to get involved in the play. Likely to be the first safety drafted next April, he could slide into the late part of round one.

Kickers

Mason Crosby/Colorado—Rarely do kickers or punters find their way into the draft's first day, but Crosby is one of the few exceptions to that rule. A big-legged field-goal kicker who consistently hits them from 50-yards or longer, Crosby also puts the ball through the end zone on kickoffs. ■

MORE NEWCOMERS

More Tide signees in winter and spring sports

It was no surprise that Alabama quickly wound up its recruiting in men's basketball in the November signing period. Just as predictable was that signees in other sports would be announced much later.

Most college winter and spring sports programs (not football) take advantage of the one-week early signing window (November 8-15) to take care of the bulk of their recruiting needs. Because a school cannot release information on these signees until all paperwork has been received from the prospective student-athlete and that signee cleared through various administrative channels, there is frequently a delay in the signing announcement.

In our last issue we detailed the latest to join the Alabama men's basketball team–Rico Pickett, Senario Hillman, and Justin Knox. We also had reports on new women's basketball signees Caitlin Hollifield, Tiernjey Jenkins, Varisia Raffington, and Daleisha Carn.

Alabama Women's Golf Coach Mic Potter went to climactic extremes for two previously announced new players. New Bama signees are Courtney Harter of Clearwater, Florida, and Camilla Lennarth from Stockholm, Sweden. Alabama Women's Tennis Coach Jenny Mainz announced the signing of Meritt Emery, the daughter of Kentucky Head Men's Tennis Coach Dennis Emery earlier.

Newcomers will enter The University prior to the 2007-08 academic year unless completing junior college or high school graduation requirements prior to January 1.

Here are additional Alabama signees from the November signing period.

BASEBALL

Coach Jim Wells added nine high school players and two junior college transfers, who will enroll at Alabama in August, 2007, and be eligible for the 2008 season. Alabama inked eight pitchers and three position players during the early signing period.

"Coach (Joe) Raccuia and Coach (B.J.) Green did an outstanding job of putting together a very good recruiting class," Wells said. "We placed a lot of emphasis this year on pitching after losing a number of players last year to the draft. We feel like we acquired some really good arms.

Connor Hoehn

Robert Phares

"We have a number of young players who will be asked to step in and contribute immediately.. We feel this is a talented group of players."

Seven of the 11 signees are from the state of Alabama.

The most recognizable name is Hoover product Ross Wilson, who is the younger brother of Alabama quarterback John Parker Wilson. Wilson, who also plays quarterback for coach Rush Propst at Hoover, is a standout infielder for coach Rick Davis' Bucs baseball squad. Wilson batted .405 with eight home runs and 38 RBI last year. He was rated by Perfect Game National Showcase as the 89th best player in the nation. He was ranked No. 42 among the Perfect Game position players. He can play three infield (2B, SS and 3B) positions. Wilson has attended the 2006 Perfect Game National Showcase and the 2006 East Cobb Professional Showcase.

The two other high school position players are Josh Rutledge and Chase Weems.

Rutledge batted .436 with five home runs and 33 RBI last year at Cullman. He led the Bearcats to the Class 5A state championship series where his team finished runner up to Stanhope Elmore. He was selected to the Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA) North-South All-Star Game. He was a Class 5A All-State honorable mention and won the offensive player award for Cullman .

Weems is a catcher at Columbus, Georgia. He participated in the 2006 East Cobb Professional Showcase. He hit .354 with four home runs last year. Weems has played for the state championship each of the last two years, winning the title in 2005 and finishing runnerup in 2006. He was named Columbus High School's Most Valuable Offensive Player in 2006.

The Crimson Tide inked six high school pitchers in this year's class, including Austin Bailey (Prattville), Justin Dutton (Russell County), Danny Danielson (Russell County), Connor Hoehn (St. John's of Demascus, Maryland), Nathan Kilcrease (Glenwood Academy of Phenix City) and Jimmy Nelson (Niceville, Florida).

Bailey plays for Coach Roger Lambert. Bailey was rated 36th in Baseball America's Top 300 High School prospects. He was also rated No. 44 by Perfect Game Showcase's Top 200 High School players. He played this summer for the East Cobb Braves. Bailey has attended the 2006 Perfect Game National Showcase, 2006 East Cobb Professional Showcase and the 2006 World Wood Bat Association (WWBA) 18-and-under National Championship.

Dutton and Danielson are teammates at Russell County in Seale, where they are coached by Tony Rasmus. The duo played on the 2005 Class 5A State championship team that posted a 38-1 record and reeled off 35 consecutive wins en route to the USA High School Baseball National Championship during their sophomore season.

Danielson played this summer for the Ohio Warhawks and this fall for the Las Vegas Meter Stars. He has also attended the 2006 WWBA World Championships, 2006 Southeast Top Prospects Showcase, 2006 WWBA 18-and-under National Championships, 2006 World Showcase and 2005 Perfect Game/Baseball America World Championship.

Dutton also played this summer with the Ohio Warhawks. He has participated in the 2006 WWBA Florida Qualifier, 2006 Southeast Top Prospects Showcase, 2006 WWBA 18-and-under National Championship and 2006 World Showcase.

Hoehn led his team to back-to-back WCAC regular season championships in 2005 and 2006. He was a first-team All-WCAC pick as a junior and second-team All-WCAC selection as a sophomore. Hoehn is rated No. 187 on Perfect Game Showcase's Top 200. He attended the 2006 WWBA World Championship, 2006 East Coast Professional Showcase, 2006 17-and-under WWBA National Championship, 2006 National Showcase and 2005 Perfect Game/Baseball

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Cosmo Catalin

Daniel Armstrong

Paige Troyan

Shannon [illegible] Gray

America World Championship.

Kilcrease recorded 102 strikeouts last year and led Glenwood Academy to the Class 3A state championship as a sophomore. He has also participated in the 2005 (15-and-under), 2006 (16-and-under) and 2006 (17-and-under) World Championships.

Nelson was 8-0 with five complete games and a 1.48 ERA as a junior. He plays for former Alabama Assistant Coach Kevin Berry, who served on Wells' staff in 1995 and 1996. He was also an all-area selection and was named Niceville's Most Valuable Player. Nelson is rated No. 125 by Perfect Game Showcase Top 200 High School players. He has participated in the 2006 WWBA World Championships, 2006 East Coast Professional Showcase, 2006 WWBA 18-and-under National Championship and 2006 Florida Showcase.

The two junior college transfers -- Robert Phares and Jamie Manning -- are both right handed pitchers.

Phares was 6-4 with a 2.77 ERA with 40 strikeouts in 61 2/3 innings at Shelton State in Tuscaloosa. Phares, who played high school baseball at Tuscaloosa Central and Paul W. Bryant, was drafted in the 24th round (733rd overall pick) by the Boston Red Sox in 2006.

Manning was 5-5 with 3.43 ERA and logged 51 strikeouts in 70 innings last year at Wallace State in Hanceville. Manning was drafted in the 45th round (1,445th overall pick) by the Colorado Rockies in the 2006 MLB First-Year Player Draft.

SOFTBALL

Coach Patrick Murphy announced four players. The class features two Alabama players from Vestavia Hills in Catherine Dozier and Whitney Larsen as well as a player of the year from Florida, Kelsi Dunne (Port Orange), and a district MVP from Texas, Amanda Locke (Mesquite).

"We are extremely pleased that we got two in-state and two out-of-state," said Murphy. "We met our goals. All four come from great families and are good students."

Dozier and Larsen played under Jennifer Brown. They helped lead their squad to second place 6A State Tournament in 2005 and 2006. Dozier is an infielder and was named the team's Defensive MVP as a freshman as well as the Vestavia Hills Best Freshman Athlete. She claimed the Offensive MVP award as a sophomore and was named Birmingham News Co-Player of the Year. She was also named to the Super All-Metro team, 6A All-Metro team, Super All-State team and 6A All-State team by the Birmingham News. She also played club softball for the Alabama Vipers and won the ASA and NSA State Championships in 2004, the ASA State Championship in 2001 and the USFA World Series Championship in 2000.

Larsen plays middle infield and outfield. She was named the team's Defensive MVP in both her sophomore and junior seasons. She earned the Cooper Ray Award for outstanding freshman athlete and the Rising Rebel Award her freshman year. She also shined on the basketball court, leading her team to the state semifinals two years in a row. She was the basketball team's Defensive MVP as a junior. She was also a member of the Birmingham Vipers that placed fifth in the nation in 2006.

Dunne attended Spruce Creek High School and was a pitcher and first baseman. Last season she led her team to the 6A State Championship game and to a 26-5 record. She earned Gatorade Florida Softball Player of the Year, the Florida Dairy Farmers "Miss Softball" Player of the Year, the Florida Dairy Farmers 6A Softball Player of the Year, EA Softball first team High School All-America, Daytona Beach News-Journal Player of the Year, Volusia/Flagler Orlando Sentinel Player of the Year and Orlando Sentinel All-Central Florida Player of the year and Wendy's High School National Heisman nominee. She set school records with 461 strikeouts and 24 shutouts in 2006. She also pitched nine no-hitters. Dunne also played club softball with Team FLA 18 Gold and competed in the 18 Gold Nationals the last two years. She was the 2006 Florida ASA Player of the Year.

Locke is a pitcher and first baseman at North Mesquite. She led her squad to the Region II Area Championship and in to the playoffs in each of the last three years. She was named to the All-Dallas-Fort Worth team, was the 5A District 12 MVP and the North Mesquite MVP in 2006. As a freshman she earned North Mesquite MVP and 5A All-District 12. She plays for the Texas Glory Gold club team, which competed in the 2006 ASA Gold Nationals and was the 2005 TAAF State Champions.

GYMNASTICS

Sarah Patterson's national powerhouse squad added Jennifer Iovino, the defending Level 10 National Floor Exercise Champion. Iovino also finished third in the all-around at the 2006 nationals. She competed at the 2005 United States Championships as a senior international elite.

The Olney, Maryland, native attends Magruder High School where she is an honor student. Iovino competed for Kelli Hill and Jen Bundy at Hill's Angels, the same gym that produced Crimson Tide All-American Raegan Tomasek along with current Alabama sophomore Cassie Martin.

"We are thrilled to have Jennifer join our program and look forward to the many great qualities and talent she brings to the Crimson Tide," Patterson said. "Jennifer and her family went through the recruiting process early in her junior year, visiting many of the nation's top programs. We feel fortunate that she committed to The University of Alabama early in the process."

SWIMMING & DIVING

The swimming and diving team signed six women and five men. "We have put together a very strong class on both the men and women's side," Coach Eric McIlquham said. "We have added not only to our talent but our over all depth. We went after the best talent available and we're excited about the potential of this class."

On the women's side, the Tide signed four swimmers and two divers. Divers Lauren Dunn (San Diego, California, Escondido Charter High School) and Kasie Talon (Dickinson, Texas) will join swimmers Katie Black (Las Vegas, Nevada, Coranado), Kate Gray (Tuscaloosa County), Jenna Montgomery (Louisville, Kentucky, Dupont Manual) and Paige Troyan (Cincinnati King's).

The men's team signed five swimmers: Daniel Armstrong (Madison Bob Jones), Catalin Cosma (Arad, Romania), James Edwards (Memphis Christian Brothers), Steven Loccisano (Fredericksburg, Virginia, Riverbend) and Daniel Rozick (State College, Pennsylvania).

A 2005 and 2006 All-America, Dunn won the one-meter board at the 2006 AAU National championships and was second off the three-meter board. A semi-finalist at the 2006 U.S. Senior National Championships, she took second off the three-meter board at the

2005 AAU Nationals and set school and league records in 2006.

The 2006 Regional Swimmer of the Year, Black holds the Nevada state record in the 100 backstroke and won both state and regional titles in the 100 butterfly. She is also a member of the 2006 state champion 200 medley and 400 freestyle relays.

Shannon Kate Gray is a Crimson Tide legacy. Her father, Alan, was an Alabama quarterback and her brothers, Stabler and Hampton, are current members of the Crimson Tide football team. She is a two-year USA Swimming Scholastic All-American and Alabama prep 200 freestyle champion.

A U.S. Junior National qualifier and two-year All-America, Montgomery won the 2006 Kentucky State 100 backstroke championship and is a member of the state record holding 200 freestyle relay team.

Troyan led Countryside YMCA to a runner-up finish at the 2006 YMCA National Championships. She is a three-year all-state and a two-time All-America breaststroker.

Armstrong led Bob Jones High School to two state titles and was the team captain in 2005 and 2006 as well as MVP in 2004 and 2005. He holds the state record in the 200 IM and is an All-America and Scholastic All-America.

Cosma led his club team, CSM Pitesti, to the Romanian national club titles since 2001. He holds Romanian Junior and Senior National records.

Edwards, a sprinter, was named MVP of his prep squad and was named the Memphis Commercial Appeal's "Best of the Preps". He was member of the 2006 Tennessee State Champion 200 freestyle relay squad.

Loccisano is a three-time sprint MVP, owns multiple school, club and district records. He is being counted on in individual and relay events.

A two-time All-America, Rozick won a state title as part of the 400 freestyle relay and is a U.S. Junior National qualifier in the 400-, 800- and 1500-meter freestyles.

VOLLEYBALL

Coach Judy Green went West–to California and Texas–for two new athletes. Vama added setter Lauren Martin of Sebastopol, California, and outside hitter-middle blocker Alyssa Meiuth of Helotes, Texas.

Martin, 5-10, played for Analy High School and for the Empire Volleyball Club based in Santa Rosa. Martin helped lead her high school team to two consecutive undefeated records in league play and helped AHS capture a North Coast Section title. A 2004 AAU All-America, Martin has earned MVP honors in her high school league the past three years and was named 2005 All-Empire Female Athlete of the Year. She was also a member of her school's honor roll all four years.

Mueth starred for O'Connor High School in Helotes. She helped her team earn a district and an area championship this season after leading OHS to a district title in 2005. A second team all-district selection last season, she was twice named Player of the Week in her area during her career. The 5-11 Mueth set career marks with 28 kills and 20 digs in separate matches as a senior. Mueth led her team in kills and served as captain this season. A National Honor Society member, she competed for the Texas Volleyball Club and SATX club team.

MEN'S TRACK & FIELD

Coach Harvey Glance announced the signing of Peter Voorhees, a junior college transfer who will compete this spring, and Odell Harris and Jamal Wilson who will both join the Tide in the 2008 season.

Voorhees is a Javelin thrower from Bow, Washington. He is a junior college transfer from Spokane Community College who has a 209-2 throw to his credit.

Harris is also a junior college transfer. A native of Wichita, Kansas, he earned a silver medal in the 2006 World Junior Championships in Beijing, China. He is a sprinter with best times of 10.35 in the 100 meter and 20.99 in the 200.

Wilson is a native of the Bahamas. He will enter as a freshman. The high jumper has a best mark of 7-1. He won the 2006 BAISS National Championship in high jump, which is the national competition for secondary schools in the Bahamas. Wilson also earned a silver medal in the Central America and Caribbean Games in 2006.

MEN'S GOLF

It had previously been announced that Alabama Men's Golf Coach Jay Seawell would have Tuscaloosa Northridge High School teammates Phillip Weaver and Hunter Slatton next year. Also joining the Tide in 2007-08 will be Spencer Cole of the Pendleton School in Bradenton, Florida.

Cole, who is a native of Greer, South Carolina, is the 2005 International Junior Golf Tour Player of the Year. He won five of seven events on the tour. He is a two-time American Junior Golf Association All-America, winning the honors in 2005 and 2006. In 2006 he won both the MCI Junior Heritage championship and the Hargray Junior Championship. In 2004 he won the AJGA's Miromar Lakes championship. Cole made the 2006 Canon Cup East team and played in the 2003 South Carolina/Georgia Matches and the 2006 South Carolina/Canada Matches. His all-time low round is a 62, though his tournament all-time low round score is 64.

There is another signing period for spring and winter sports beginning April 11. ■

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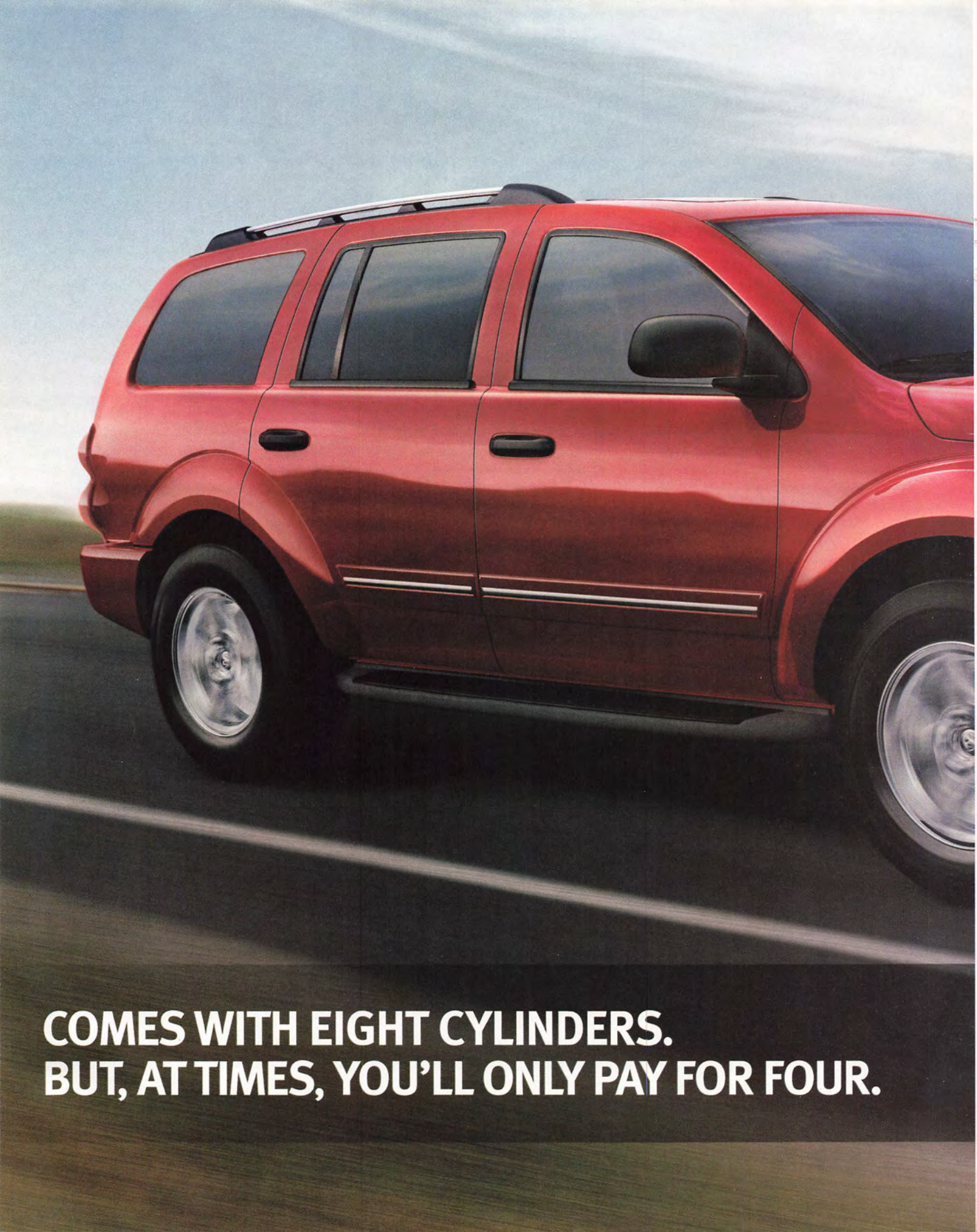
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BUCKLE UP

GEE!

Tide sophomore makes giant leap forward

When Alonzo Gee agreed to run with the Alabama basketball team after a prolific career at Palm Beach Gardens (Florida) Dwyer High School, Crimson Tide Coach Mark Gottfried figured he had scored a pure jump shooter.

That's what Gottfried saw on Gee's videotape.

That's what the naked eye saw when Gottfried scouted Gee personally. The muscular Gee worked the perimeter, shot 3-pointers and helped Dwyer to back-to-back Class 5A state championships.

That advance scouting turned out to be only partly right.

Instead of being simply a shooter, Gee has emerged as a dynamic jumper with great finishing ability in the lane, as well as a jump-shooter with skills that are still in the process of maturing.

"Since he's been here, he's so good at going to the basket," said junior point guard Ron Steele, who is also one of Gee's roommates. "He's improving in that every day. It's tough to stop him getting to the basket."

The 6-5 sophomore led Alabama in scoring with 16 points per game through an 8-1 start, and might have led the nation in dunking with 22 slams, including six jams in an alley-oop spectacular in which he scored 18 points in a win over Iowa in the Paradise Jam.

"(Gee's leaping ability) was not something we were real familiar with to be honest," Gottfried said. "He's improved that too. He was a good leaper before he came, and our strength and conditioning program helped him become a better jumper.

"It's been a little bit surprising. When we recruited him, I loved the way he shot the ball. I still do, but he just hasn't shot it as well as he's gone to the basket. That's been an interesting thing to watch."

Gee's slashing and stuffing have overshadowed his jump-shooting reputation during the early portion of his career at The Capstone.

"I always had the athletic ability to jump and all that, but I was mainly just a shooter (in high school)," Gee said. "That's pretty much what I am right now, I've just got to get my confidence up and get going."

Gee had hit 6 of 18 three-pointers (.333) through eight games, which is a lower percentage than he'd want from that range. His overall shooting of 56.1 per cent was best on the team, thanks mostly to the shots he hits when the top of his head is seemingly at rim level.

"Obviously he's a great athlete," Steele said. "He can offensive rebound and he can really finish. He runs the floor well."

His excellent performance in wins over Middle Tennessee, Iowa and Xavier in the Paradise Jam in the Virgin Islands earned him the Most Valuable Player award in that tournament.

Gee sees his value as coming from shooting and slashing.

"I feel I've got to do both," he said. "It's good that I go out, cut to the basket, finish strong and stuff like that. But I've also got to get my jump shot going."

Gee whizzed to some serious heights as an undaunted freshman last season. He scored 11 points in his second game and was a starter by the seventh game of the year.

But his performances yo-yoed.

Gee was completely invisible in Alabama's conference-opening loss to Ole Miss, as he had no points and one rebound as a starter.

The next game he hit 4 of 8 shots from the field, 3 of 4 from 3-point range, and seemed completely unfazed by the enormity of his 17-point, 10-rebound showing in a 56-52 win at Auburn.

"It's big to beat Auburn, and I didn't know it was that big until this year," Gee said.

Gottfried loved the freshman's moxie last season.

"He didn't hesitate to take the big shot," Gottfried said.

But just like a rookie, Gee followed that sizzling performance at Beard-Eaves Coliseum with a 1-for-5, two-point game at Kentucky.

"Like most freshmen, last year he was inconsistent," Gottfried said. "He'd have a good game, then he'd be a non-factor, then he'd have another good game, then he'd be a non-factor.

"This year he's much more consistent. You can count on him scoring, and he's becoming a better defender."

Alonzo was good enoughj last year to make first team Freshman All-Southeastern Conference in a vote of the league's head basketball coaches. We was SEC Freshman of the Week in his first month of competition.

He averaged 8.6 points and 3.4 rebounds per game as a freshman. In the final four games leading up to the NCAA Tournament, Gee scored 11 points in Bama's win over his home-state University, Florida, the eventual national champion; 21 against Auburn, 15 at Mississippi State, and 18 in the SEC Tournament quarterfinals against Kentucky.

Gee's commitment to the game was most impressive to his teammates during the offseason. He worked to get stronger and kept polishing all aspects of his game.

"We all saw in the summertime he was dominating all the pickup games," Steele said.

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"Nobody was really stopping him. He was doing everything he wanted to do."

Gee's quick hands have been the catalyst for many a fast-break dunk this year, but he's also been burned by moving out of position and missing a pass by inches.

"There's a lot of learning I need to do on defense," Gee said. "I'm not near close to the defensive player I could be."

His coach agreed.

"He's becoming a better defender, but he's not there yet," Gottfried said. "He's working really hard at it. I'm really pleased with his progress from his freshman year to now.

"Where he gets hurt defensively–it's a Catch 22–is he gambles a lot. There are times when he gambles and turns it into something really good. There are other times when he leaves his man or isn't in the right place on the floor.

"That's all part of being a young player and learning. They haven't had time to learn all the ins and outs."

Beyond all of Gee's physical skills and his scoring prowess, Gottfried has a great appreciation for his mental makeup.

"He's so coachable," he said. "He tries to do everything you ask him, and he listens to everything you say."

The 19-year-old, who is a budding amateur artist, has created his share of aristry on the court with some stunning alley-oop slams, most of them courtesy of his roommate Steele.

"I've done it so many times with him, I don't even think about it," Steele said. "I just know he's going to make the play."

On the break against Tennessee State recently, Steele had dribbled one step over halfcourt when he spied Gee racing down the right baseline and drifted up a perfect lob for Gee to snatch and flush.

"That's just playing with each other every day," Gee said. "We played every day over the summer. I just know his game and he knows my game."

Alabama's fast start, and its rise to the number four ranking in the Associated Press poll and as high as number three by Scout.com has Crimson Tide fans thinking this could be the start of something big for Bama hoops.

"I think we're a pretty good team right now," Gee said. "There's still some areas we need to improve in. Down the line, I think we can be a great team." ■

Alonzo Gee much improved as sophomore

BASEBALL BY MITCH DOBBS

TOUGH JOB

Bama faces difficulties in defending championship

Most will look at the upcoming baseball season from a snapshot point of view. Alabama returned four starters and lost five from last year's Southeastern Conference Championship team. Wade LeBlanc, Bama's best pitcher from last season, is gone, but Tommy Hunter is a promising up-and-coming replacement. Bama's two-, three- and four-hole hitters for much of last year are gone, too.

In those terms, the 2007 team is a mixed bag with a lot of questions. Those thoughts don't consume Crimson Tide Head Coach Jim Wells, who is entering his 13th season at Alabama.

"You literally go day-to-day instead of being caught up in results–instead of going 'Who's going to be our closer? Who's going to pitch after Hunter?'" Wells said. "And that works. It's more productive. You get more out of the day because you don't end up going 'What the hell's going to happen?'

"Now you just go, 'Hyatt got better today. Kebodeaux got a little better breaking ball. Vargas can catch a fly ball moving to his right over his head now."

Last year renewed Wells' faith that sometimes it can fall in place by taking that approach instead of dwelling on what he might not have. Alabama is still at a disadvantage in terms of lottery scholarships, which give about half of the schools in the SEC a huge personnel advantage.

"Sometimes I come out of those meetings going, 'Gee, I don't feel too good about myself,'" Wells said. "At South Carolina last year we played them and they've got a first baseman who turned down $800,000 and a shortstop who turned down $1.5 million. We've got a first baseman who hasn't played baseball in three years and a shortstop on books and (South Carolina Head Coach Ray) Tanner's complaining to me he doesn't have enough players. I can't relate to those guys."

Much of what the NCAA has done in recent years has been to "level the playing field," as the movers and shakers in that organization claim. Some schools had athletics dormitories and some did not. Unfair. The schools that had them had to give them up. Some schools had a dozen or more assistant football coaches. Unfair. No school can have more than nine assistant coaches. And on and on.

But not in baseball. A number of states earmark revenue from state-sponsored gambling for high school graduates to be able to attend college. Schools like Georgia and LSU take those funds to bring in excellent players, and those players–on full scholarship–don't count against the scholarship limits of the sport. That means a school with lottery scholarships for the in-state players can use all their athletics scholarship money (in the case of baseball 11 total scholarships for the team) on out-of-state players.

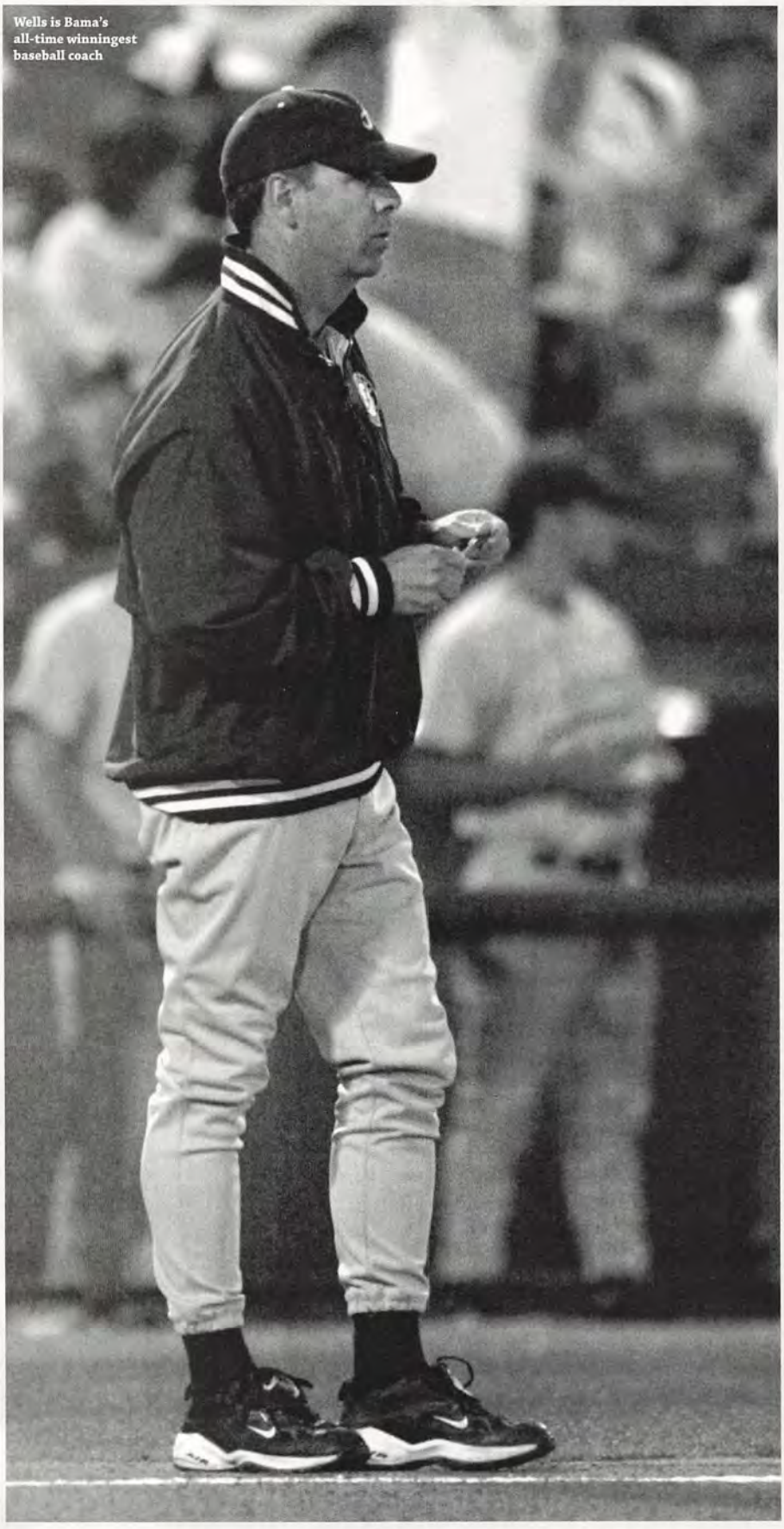
While a school like Alabama is dividing up its 11 scholarships–books to this one, room and board to that one, tuition to another–the state schools benefitting from gambling are giving "jumbo" scholarships.

Wells said, "Most of those people with the extra aid give jumbo scholarship and they just sign guys. Out of 60 guys they get 20 who can play. Right or wrong, we've got to develop our guys."

Austin Hyatt and Casey Kebodeaux are two right-handed pitchers without much experience under their belts Wells is hoping to bring along. Austin Graham, Patrick Kelly and Miers Quigley (the only returning left-handed pitcher) are others who might emerge. American Christian Academy's Del Howell is a freshman lefty who

Tide centerfielder Emeel Salem is returning All-American

University of Alabama



Wells is Bama's all-time winningest baseball coach

University of Alabama

might also factor in this spring. Josh Copeland and Bernard Robert are the most experienced pitchers in addition to Hunter.

Centerfielder and leadoff man Emeel Salem is Bama's top player in the field. He opted to turn down good professional money and return to Alabama for his senior season.

"He's counted on heavily and he'll do his part," Wells said. "Now, when you get to be a senior you try and make others around you good instead of your full attention be on you being good."

Salem was named to the preseason watch list for the 2007 Brooks Wallace Award, presented annually to the top collegiate baseball player by the College Baseball Foundation and Hall of Fame. He was the only unanimous All-SEC selection last year as a junior, and led the Crimson Tide with a .356 batting average, with two home runs and 32 RBI. He also led the Crimson Tide with 67 runs scored and he paced the SEC with 36 stolen bases.

Salem was named First-Team All-America by College Baseball Foundation and was an ESPN the Magazine First-Team Academic All-America selection with a double major in Business Management and Spanish.

And Hunter said it's easier to pitch when "the fastest centerfielder in the game" is backing him up, which is a quality that shouldn't go unnoticed.

Wells said Alex Avila will be in the lineup for his bat, and in the field at either first or third base. Bama lost third baseman Matt Downs and first baseman Spencer Pennington from last year's squad.

Greg Paiml returns at shortstop.

Evan Bush was the 2006 Crimson Tide second baseman. Jeff Texada and Brandon May will battle for the starting position at second base this spring.

Brandon Belcher, a senior who started in left field much of last season, will return to the pitcher's mound this year and play in the outfield when he is not pitching. Kent Matthes was a parttime player in both left field and right field last year and he is back this season. Elvin Vargas is also a candidate for outfield playing time.

The catcher's spot is most disconcerting. Bama signed Vinny DiFazio out of Indian River Community College to be the number one catcher, but he was diagnosed with brachial neuritis, a disease that causes great pain and affects the ability to use certain muscles.

"He lost his strength and he can't use one of his arms," Wells said. "We've pretty much been

told he will be unable to play this year and the hope is he will be able to play again in his life."

Jared Avchen was the second catcher Wells brought in. He broke his foot and was out most of the fall. He is supposed to be back in the spring, and the hope is that Avchen will get healthy.

Ryan Rhoden, who played right field last year, caught all fall and would otherwise be the Tide's catcher if Avchen cannot. Rhoden caught in high school and in American Legion ball.

One thing not in question is Alabama coaching.

Wells is the winningest coach in Crimson Tide history. The UA skipper notched his 488th victory last season to break the previous record of 487 wins held by Barry Shollenbeger (1980-94). Wells has compiled a 525-243 (.684) record in his 768 game career with the Crimson Tide.

Overall, Wells begins his 18th season as a Division I head coach and has compiled a 717-332 (.684) record in 1,049 career games.

Wells notched his 500th win at Alabama with a 5-4 win over number one-ranked Mississippi State on April 1, 2006. The game drew a stadium record crowd of 6,821.

With 525 wins, Wells is the eighth winningest coach in SEC history.

In his 17 seasons, Wells has won five regular-season conference championships, eight post-season conference championships, and taken 13 of his 17 teams to NCAA Regional play, with three teams advancing to the College World Series.

The Crimson Tide captured the 2006 SEC Championship with a 20-10 record. Alabama (44-21) won its sixth NCAA Regional championship and fourth under Wells last season. Bama played in the NCAA Super Regionals for the second time in school history and first since 1999.

Wells said, "We had just enough and all the parts fit to make for a team, but we did not see that in December, did not see that in January. We did not see that, really, until conference play began."

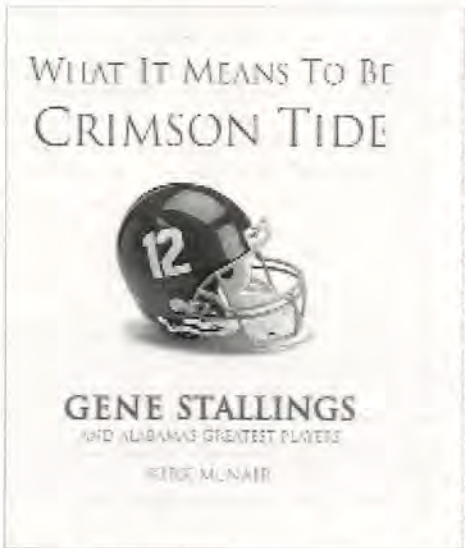
Alabama has played in 10 NCAA Tournaments in 12 years under Wells. UA has also won six SEC Tournament (1995, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2002 and 2003) titles.

He has twice been named SEC "Coach of the Year" (1996, 2002) by his peers. He was named Southland Conference Coach of the Year three times. ■

What It Means To Be Crimson Tide

Gene Stallings and Alabama's Greatest Players

Alabama football means championships and All-Americans and, for many, memories of a man in a houndstooth hat. Some 60 former Alabama players who performed in Crimson and White over a 75-year period tell us What it means to be Crimson Tide, and many remember Paul "Bear" Bryant. His time as a Bama player, assistant coach, and 25 years as head coach is a major part of Alabama football, but not the only great era. There have also been national championships won under Wallace Wade and Frank Thomas and Gene Stallings. And part of What it means to be Crimson Tide is former Alabama players' expectations of more national titles.



The last coach to lead Alabama to the national championship is Gene Stallings, who played and coached for Coach Bryant before becoming a Hall of Fame caliber coach himself.

Not only have the coaches been legendary but that stellar tradition has spawned players enshrined in the College Football Hall of Fame and the NFL's Pro Football Hall of Fame. Now, Gene Stallings and 'Bama Editor Kirk McNair have collaborated to bring together many of the greatest players ever to wear the Crimson and White to share their memories in What it Means to be Crimson Tide-Gene Stallings and Alabama's greatest players.

Among those sharing their memories are: from the '40s and '50s, Harry Gilmer and Bart Starr; from the '60s and '70s, Lee Roy Jordan, Joe Namath, Ray Perkins, Ken Stabler, Johnny Musso, John Hannah, and Ozzie Newsome; from the '80s and '90s, Mike Shula and Jay Barker. And many more, including those from the new millennium.

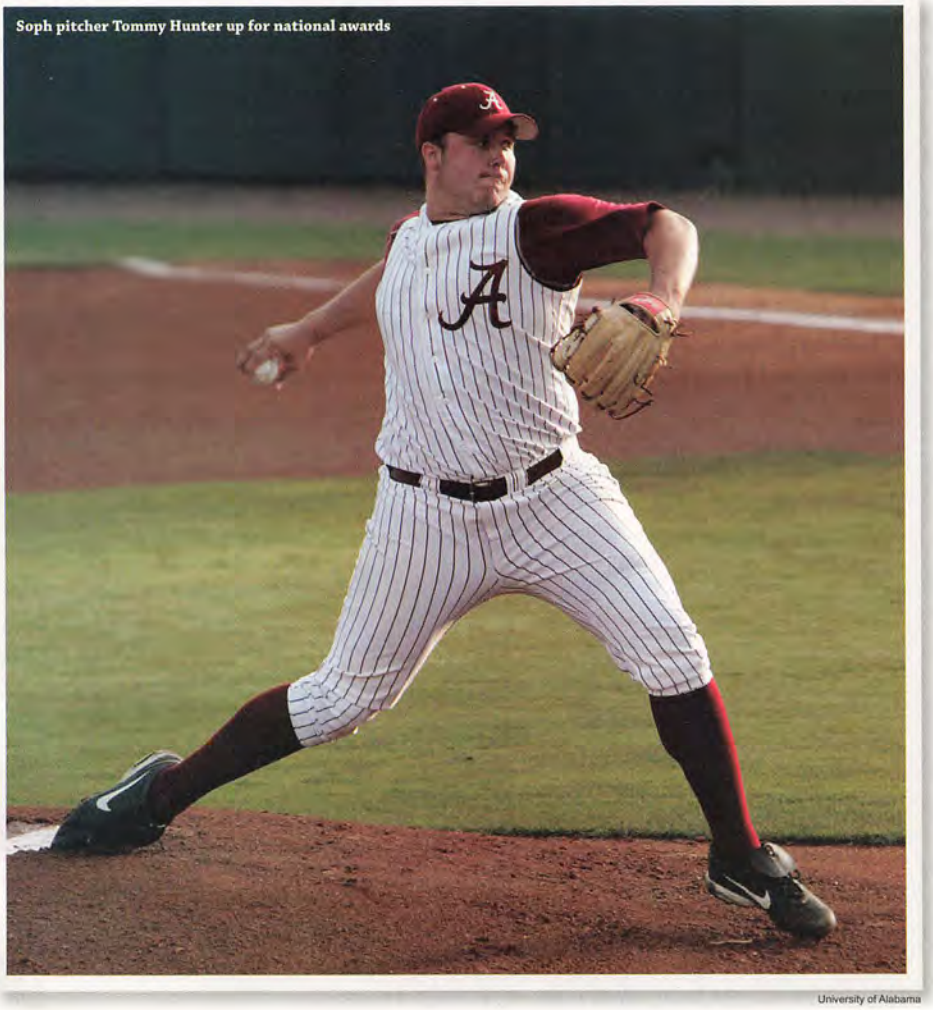
Gene Stallings reveals much of his philosophy and also tells the story of how he did *not* become Alabama's head football coach in 1983. Kirk McNair introduces the players.

What it Means to be Crimson Tide-Gene Stallings and Alabama's greatest players is now available. The hardcover book is more than 300 pages in an oversized format with archival photographs throughout. To order your copy ($27.95 plus tax, shipping and handling) call 1-205-345-5074. You may request a personalized autograph from Kirk McNair.

BASEBALL BY MITCH DOBBS

BIG MAN

Tide pitcher Tommy Hunter plays to win



Soph pitcher Tommy Hunter up for national awards

University of Alabama

There are five million people in China who don't know anything about Alabama sophomore pitcher Tommy Hunter. Hunter doesn't know anyone in China, either. Best bet is the Chinese are missing out more than Hunter is. The Alabama baseball star is one of Bama's most interesting characters.

At 20 years old he's had kids follow him like a rock star through the streets of Havana, Cuba, and had opposing fans jeer him for being overweight. He's won a Southeastern Conference Championship, and he gave up a home run that cost his team a trip to Omaha and the College World Series. Not long after giving up that homer, he watched the replays of it on ESPN SportsCenter–with the man who hit it.

In early December he killed a ten-point deer–a week after he first began hunting. He takes life in stride, and with a sense of humor.

There are really about two billion people in China who don't know Hunter. Crimson Tide Coach Jim Wells understated Hunter's relative anonymity on a Sunday last May before Hunter's start in the final regular season game of the year against Tennessee in Knoxville. The game was to clinch the SEC regular season championship for the Crimson Tide, which had been predicted to finish fourth in the SEC West.

"Before the game started I was throwing the ball everywhere," Hunter said. "I couldn't hit the mitt. Coach Wells was trying to calm me down because I'm pumped; I'm ready to go. He told me to step back and take a deep breath and he told me there's five million people in China who have no idea who I am."

Hunter pitched eight innings of shutout baseball against the Vols and Alabama built a five run lead off home runs from Spencer Pennington and Matt Downs en route to the 5-1 championship clinching victory.

"South Carolina was probably the best pitched game, but Tennessee was the best game I've ever played in," Hunter said. "It's a chance to win an SEC championship and they put me out there."

A Tennessee home run with two outs in the ninth ended Hunter's shutout bid, providing an interesting symmetry to the SEC regular season. He closed out the complete game and Alabama's regular season getting the next batter to ground out.

"The first SEC game of the year there was a shutout going and Wade (LeBlanc) gave up a home run to Georgia (in a 4-1 Bama win)," Hunter said, "and on the last game of the year I gave up a home run to the Tennessee guy. Wade and I laughed about that."

The South Carolina game Hunter mentioned was when the Tide faced the nation's number one ranked Gamecocks in Columbia in April. Hunter's

game would decide the series. South Carolina won the first game and Alabama took game two of the series, which was the first of a Sunday seven-inning doubleheader due to rain the previous day.

"The crowd got to me a little bit at the beginning of the game," Hunter said. They were chanting "Biscuit" at the 250-pound large-framed freshman. It wasn't long before Hunter and the small crowd of Bama fans turned the tables.

"That might have been the best game I pitched all year," Hunter said. "I was able to throw inside, outside. I was able to do whatever I wanted at any time during the game. And that biscuit chant that they started was the funniest thing I've ever seen."

As Hunter mowed through the South Carolina lineup giving up just three hits in the game and no more than one in any inning, the Alabama parents adopted the "Biscuit" cheer and the Gamecock fans were quiet.

"Our little crowd of 30 parents turned it on that crowd of 7,000," Hunter said. "It makes you feel comfortable that people are behind you, and that's what Alabama is."

There are never grudges or hurt feelings with Hunter. It's all a part of the game.

He said, "After the game, all the parents of the South Carolina players came up and shook my hand and said that was a great game. That's really cool. Those were probably the same people that were chanting 'Biscuit' at beginning of the game but then were shaking my hand at the end."

If there was anything that might be tough to get over from his freshman season, it would have been the way it ended for Alabama on Sewell-Thomas Stadium. Bama was the number four national seed in the NCAA tournament, and hosting a Super Regional three-game series against North Carolina where the winner went to Omaha and the College World Series.

Already down a game in the series, Hunter pitched into the eighth inning in game two when he started to tire. Bama was leading 4-2 when Hunter hit a batter and gave up a single to bring up UNC first baseman Chad Flack with two on and nobody out. On the first pitch Flack squared to bunt and took a ball.

"I told myself getting up there: 'Throw a strike, make sure the ball gets down on the ground, go get it and throw him out,'" Hunter said. "I took a deep breath, got up there, threw the ball, he swung and that ball went about 500 feet. As soon as he hit it my chin hit my chest. I knew it. Coach Wells went out there, I gave him the ball and ran off the field."

UNC Coach Mike Fox took off the bunt and let Flack swing away. Bama's Wells took the blame for expecting the bunt and calling the pitch. That wasn't the end of Flack's heroics, however. Alabama re-gained the lead in the top of the ninth inning with a three-run home run by Alex Avila which put Bama back on top 7-6. In the bottom of the ninth Flack hit a game-winning two-run home run that cleared the right field wall by about three feet to end the game.

"I remember it like it was yesterday," Hunter said. "It was very, very impressive. He hit the ball. That's what he's supposed to do and he did it."

Flack and Hunter had a chance encounter later that evening, as SportsCenter was showing the highlights of the game that was televised by ESPN.

Because the spring semester was over, Hunter had moved out of his apartment and into a hotel, the same hotel where North Carolina was staying. Hunter said, "When I walked in after the game they were all in the lobby watching SportsCenter, and about that time I heard Stuart Scott says 'Hunter blows it in the eighth for Alabama.'

"It kind of shocked them but I walked in and sat on the couch with them and watched SportsCenter. They cracked a few jokes here and there but I laughed them off. It's a big deal, but it's not life and death. You win some and you lose some."

It's not life and death, but Hunter likes to compete. He said he doesn't let his mother win if they are competing, and Jim Wells saw that competitive spirit early in his freshman year, during a team-building competition much like a "field day" the players participated in during the off-season.

Wells said, "Tommy Hunter, weighs 270 pounds, and I see him out-running people because he wouldn't quit. And he's outrunning a 170 pound guy and you're going 'Man, there's a little something extra to that kid.'"

Last summer Hunter was selected for the USA National Baseball Team. The USA defeated Chinese Taipei 18-9 to capture the gold medal at the FISU World University Championships in Havana, Cuba.

(Okay, so now some Chinese probably DO know who Tommy Hunter is.)

"It was an experience," Hunter said. "Just going to Cuba and seeing what goes on there, because not too many people go to Cuba. But the baseball was unbelievable, too. Being a part of something like I was makes you sit back and think about what you accomplished. The summer team was the best team in U.S. History."

The USA National Team finished the summer with a 28-2-1 overall record and successfully defended its 2004 FISU gold medal. The .919 winning percentage was the best ever by a USA Baseball collegiate team and the tournament win was the first ever for a USA Baseball National Team in Cuba.

Hunter appeared in 14 games, mostly as a reliever, the first time he had been in a relief role. He did have one start, and compiled a 3-0 record and 3.80 earned run average. He worked 21 1/3 innings and allowed 19 hits, 11 runs and nine earned runs, with five walks and 23 strikeouts.

Hunter took advantage of the cultural experience of being in Cuba. He said, "You see pictures of Castro on billboards, and there's a sign right after the U.S. Embassy that says 'We're not scared of you.' I guess the government and those type of people don't like us, but I felt safe. The people loved us. They would do anything for us. You ask somebody to do something and they say 'You play U.S.A?' and you'd shake your head and they would just go nuts.

"We went a to a flea market that was about five miles long. We'd walk through there as a team and crowds of people, all the little kids would be following us just like you'd see in movies."

Hunter enjoys food, but Cuban cuisine didn't agree with him. He got sick and returned home with a virus. He lost about 20 pounds. His diet in Cuba? "Pretty much it was rice and ice cream," he said. "I don't drink coffee, but I drank coffee out of a machine."

The relief pitching in Cuba wore on Hunter's arm, and he didn't throw much in the fall. He is trying to learn a change-up to go with the fastball and curveball he now commands. He threw more change-ups in Cuba than he did all of last year. Among many honors over the past year, Hunter was named to the preseason watch list for the 2007 Roger Clemens Award, presented annually to the top collegiate pitcher by the Greater Houston Baseball Association. That has created some lofty expectations for his second year at The Capstone.

And he doesn't believe in a sophomore slump.

Hunter posted a 10-3 (.769) record and 3.60 ERA in 20 appearances on the mound last season. He set Alabama freshman records for wins (10) and innings pitched (117 1/3), and is expected to be the number one starter on this year's squad. That is a role he will assume from Wade LeBlanc, who left Alabama one of the most prolific pitchers in school history.

"I don't want to stop at the SEC championship this year," Hunter said. "I want to make it to Omaha, and then win it."

What about individual goals?

"It's not about individual," he said. "I really could care less about the individual stuff. All that stuff's good, but this is a team game. When I was growing up, my mom said, 'It's not about you. There's nine other, 10 other, 13 other guys out there playing. Why don't you win for them. Don't always think about yourself.'

"My mom's a pretty strong woman. She says jump, I ask how high. That's one of the people in my life I listen to." ■

2007 Alabama Baseball Roster

No	Name	Pos	B/T	Ht	Wt	Yr	Hometown
1	Kyle Moore	IF	R/R	6-2	190	So	Wetumpka
2	Emeel Salem	OF	L/L	6-0	175	Sr	Mountain Brook
3	Greg Paiml	IF	R/R	6-0	185	Sr	Hoover
6	Brandon May	IF	R/R	6-0	185	Fr	Marietta, Ga.
7	Miers Quigley	LHP	L/L	6-4	225	So	Roswell, Ga.
8	J.J. Baswell	C	R/R	6-0	200	Fr	Millport
9	Del Howell	LHP	L/L	6-3	190	Fr	Tuscaloosa
10	Jeff Texada	IF	R/R	6-0	180	So	New Iberia, La.
11	Wes Henderson	IF	R/L	6-2	212	So	Oxford
13	Josh Copeland	RHP	R/R	6-3	235	Jr	Palmetto, Ga.
14	Jake Smith	IF	R/R	6-3	180	Fr	Shannon
15	Will Stroup	LHP	L/L	5-11	172	Jr	Birmingham
16	Alex Avila	IF	L/R	6-0	205	So	Pembroke Pines, Fla.
21	Austin Evans	RHP	R/R	6-3	200	Fr	Tampa, Fla.
22	Kent Matthes	OF	R/R	6-3	207	So	Orlando, Fla.
23	Jared Avchen	C	R/R	6-0	210	Fr	Palm Bay, Fla.
24	Vincent DiFazio	C	R/R	6-2	200	Jr	Hampton, N.J.
25	Matt Bentley	IF	L/R	6-2	216	Jr	Huntsville
27	Austin Graham	RHP	L/R	6-3	195	Fr	Hoover
28	Brian Griggs	LHP	R/L	6-0	192	Jr	Melbourne, Fla.
29	Patrick Kelly	RHP	R/R	6-4	195	Sr	Dothan
30	Jason Garner	LHP	L/L	6-4	200	Jr	Trussville
31	Casey Kebodeaux	RHP	R/R	6-2	200	So	Mandeville, La.
32	Brandon Belcher	LHP	L/L	6-0	185	Sr	Ruston, La.
33	Tommy Hunter	RHP	R/R	6-4	250	So	Indianapolis, Ind.
34	Ryan Rhoden	OF	R/R	6-2	210	So	Tuscaloosa
35	Elvin Vargas	OF	R/R	6-4	205	Jr	New York
36	Austin Hyatt	RHP	R/R	6-3	190	So	Marietta, Ga.
43	Tyler Odle	OF	L/L	6-0	180	So	Vestavia Hills
44	Mike Meschke	IF	L/R	6-2	235	Fr	Marietta, Ga.
45	Bernard Robert	RHP	R/R	6-0	180	Sr	Denham Springs, La.

HEAD COACH: Jim Wells

ASSISTANT COACHES: B.J. Green and Joe Raccuia

DIRECTOR OF BASEBALL OPERATIONS: Allen Rice

VOLUNTEER COACH: Chad Oxendine

Easy As 3, 4, 5

Tide must replace heart of batting order

The University of Alabama softball team is coming off a 2006 season that featured its first Southeastern Conference Championship after a 15-0 conference start, its eighth straight NCAA tournament appearance, and fourth Women's College World Series appearance.

And Coach Patrick Murphy isn't satisfied.

"We won the SEC, which was goal number one," he said of the title which was Alabama's first regular season SEC softball championship. "Goal number two was to get to the World Series. We just need a little luck the next time we get there. We want to stay a little longer. We want to win it."

To repeat in 2007, Murphy will have to replace the 3-4-5 hitters from the 2006 lineup: shortstop Dominique Accetturo, second baseman Staci Ramsey—whose 57 RBIs were an SEC-best—and reigning SEC Pitcher of the Year Stephanie VanBrakle.

Doing so, Murphy says, is as easy as in other sports.

"We do it just like everybody else does every year," he said. "I think it's an awesome advantage for our program to play in the spring, because you get to see football, basketball, soccer and all the teams before you go through it and learn from them.

"It's like other teams who lose seniors and they have to plug new people in, and it's the same way with us. I can see it right now in some kids in the back of their mind that they're going to have a great year and that they're going to have that breakout year that they've been waiting for."

The team returns 15 players this season, including five seniors. While the Tide's lineup looks to be even more potent than last season's, the key to a repeat campaign for Murphy lies on the pitching mound.

"We have 15 players coming back and a wide mix of starters and role players," Murphy said. "It's probably one of the largest returning classes we've ever had. I think without a doubt, offensively it could be one of our best teams ever. The question marks are the pitching, first, and who's going to step up in the 3-4-5 spots that we lost."

The experience of 15 returning players transferred to fall practice as the coaches and players felt the team was further along than in any previous years.

"We didn't have to focus as much on the basics because almost everybody had been through it before," said Murphy. "We were in the first week of practice and it felt like we were in the third week because the practices were going so fast and everybody knew the routine."

If the fall season was any sign of things to come, Alabama softball is in for another great season as the pitching, defense and offense all had outstanding performances. In four games, Bama posted four shutouts. The pitching staff made up of Chrissy Owens, Blair Potter and Allison Moore combined to pitch 23 innings, allowing just nine hits with 30 strikeouts and only two walks. The opponents hit just .117 against the Crimson Tide.

The defense committed just two errors despite having only one week of practice before the first fall tournament and three weeks before the second. The offense was also dominant, scoring 42 runs, an average of 10.5 runs per game. Alabama combined to hit .394 (39-of-99) with eight doubles, two triples and two home runs. Bama drew eight walks for a .450 on base percentage and stole 13-of-14 bases.

Leading the list of returning players is sophomore center fielder Brittany Rogers, who was named to the NFCA and Easton All-America teams. She was tabbed the 2006 SEC Freshman of the Year as well as a first team NFCA All-South Region choice. She led the Crimson Tide in several offensive categories, including a .427 batting average, 60 runs scored, 88 hits, .476 on base percentage, and 38 stolen bases.

Team speed is expected to be a strong feature for Alabama as the Tide returns four players who tallied 10 or more stolen bases last season. Jordan Praytor, a second team NFCA All-Region selection and first team All-SEC choice, finished second on the squad with 27 stolen bases last year. She was also second with a .415 batting average, 57 runs scored, 78 hits and nine home runs.

Mandy Burford was third on the team with 18 stolen bases, a .318 batting average and 42 runs scored. Mallory Benak was a dangerous pinch-runner for the Tide, stealing 11 bases in 12 attempts.

Speed is also a strength for the pitching staff as Owens, a junior pitcher from Miami, Florida, packs some heat on the mound. She went 21-5 last season and was second in the nation with a 0.68 earned run average. She earned a spot on the NFCA All-South Region second team after striking out 190 batters and allowing just 15 earned runs in 154 innings.

Blair Potter is projected to be the number two pitcher for the Crimson Tide. Entering her senior season after transferring from Wallace-Dothan Community College, she posted a 2.22 ERA and a 5-0 record in her first season at The Capstone. She is a left-handed pitcher that poses problems to opposing squads' right-handed batters as they hit just .153 (20-131) last season against her. Sophomore Allison Moore and freshman Charlotte Morgan could also see time

Blair Potter will be counted on as Tide pitcher

University of Alabama

on the mound.

Other returning starters for the Crimson Tide include Dani Woods, Kelley Montalvo, Katie Johnson and Ashley Holcombe. Woods, a 2006 second team All-SEC pick, had an outstanding fall season with a team-high .667 average (6-of-9) and six RBI in three games. She hit .287 in her sophomore season last year with a team-high 17 doubles to go along with seven home runs and 50 RBI. She is a likely candidate to fill one of the middle spots in the order this season.

Montalvo was one of the most improved players in the fall and it showed when she hit one home run with six RBI and four runs scored in three games. She was one of the top home run hitters in practice. She earned freshman All-SEC honors last season after hitting .285 with three home runs and 20 RBI.

Holcombe was a second team All-SEC catcher. She started 61 games with a .242 batting average, 10 doubles, three home runs and 18 RBI. Johnson started 42 games and posted a .242 average with 14 runs scored and a 1.000 fielding percentage last year.

One of the spots up for grabs this fall was the starting shortstop position. Michelle Menningmann was the leading candidate, starting all four games in the fall and posting a .400 average (4-for-10) with four runs scored. She played in 46 games as a junior with six starts.

Also returning for the Tide are Allison Moore, Kellie Eubanks, Kellie Deska and Jessica Smith. Moore hit two home runs with nine RBI in 29 games on the season. Eubanks started 18 games and played in 32 contests with seven hits. Deska saw time in 11 games and Smith redshirted her freshman season last year.

The Crimson Tide also has three newcomers, including a transfer from Baylor and two freshmen. Lauren Parker, a sophomore infielder from Port Neches, Texas, played for the Bears last season and started 30 games. She hit .266 with eight doubles and 10 RBI. She could also compete for the shortstop starting spot. Charlotte Morgan, a pitcher and utility player from Moreno Valley, California, had an outstanding debut for Alabama in the fall hitting .625 (5-of-8) with five RBI, four runs scored, two doubles and a triple for a 1.125 slugging percentage. She is a right-handed power hitter who hit four home runs at the Gold Nationals Tournament in the summer of 2005 and is a left-handed pitcher. Alex Blewitt, a third baseman from Archbald, Pennsylvania, hit .286 with four runs scored in the fall and is also expected to provide some more power to the lineup.

The 2006 South Region Coaching Staff of the Year is back for their seventh season together. Murphy, the co-SEC Coach of the Year, will try to guide the Crimson Tide to a second straight SEC Championship and fifth Women's College World Series. He is joined by pitching coach Vann Stuedeman and first base coach Alyson Habetz.

Since he was elevated from assistant to head coach in July of 1998, Murphy's teams have been a model of consistency. The 2006 season marked the Tide's fourth 50-win season in program history and its third trip to the Women's College World Series in four years. It was the second consecutive year the Tide made an appearance in the WCWS and second straight Super Regional championship.

But for all the success Murphy has brought to the Alabama softball program, the tenth anniversary of the program brought different expectations for the Tide in 2006.

"We started out 15-0 and we ran the table, really, the whole season," Murphy said. "We were in the lead the whole time. It was such a gratifying year because no one—not one SEC coach—picked us to win it. To lose seven seniors the year before, I don't think anyone expected us to do it."

Offensively, Murphy's 2006 team was one of Alabama's most dominant. The Tide outscored its opponents, 363-103, produced 220 more RBIs and knocked 40 more home runs than its foes. Alabama's team batting average was .300.

When scoring six or more runs, the Tide was 33-0, and Alabama pitchers only allowed one home run in conference play while accumulating a 1.13 team ERA.

After accumulating a 25-4 conference record, the Tide fell 2-1 to Tennessee in the SEC Tournament. After cruising through the NCAA Regional and Super Regional, Alabama dropped consecutive games to Northwestern and UCLA at the College World Series to end the 2006 campaign with a 54-11 overall record.

One main reason for Alabama's consistent success on the diamond is the Tide's strong play at home. Alabama won 30 home games last year—many in front of capacity crowds—while dropping only four contests.

A similar attendance level, Murphy says, can have as much of a positive effect in 2007.

"Last year the success at home was key," he said. "I think college student-wise we've had our best attendance. I see more and more college students in the crowd, which is great because it's an exciting game. I think they'd love it if they'd come out and watch it."

The Crimson Tide will kick off the 2007 season at the Texas State Tournament in San Marcos, Texas, February 9-11. Alabama returns home to host three tournaments over the next three weekends beginning with the Bama Bash! February 16-18 and followed by the Crimson Classic February 23-25 and the Easton Spring Fling March 2-4. Alabama begins its quest for a second straight SEC Championship when it opens conference play with a home series against Mississippi State March 10-11. ■

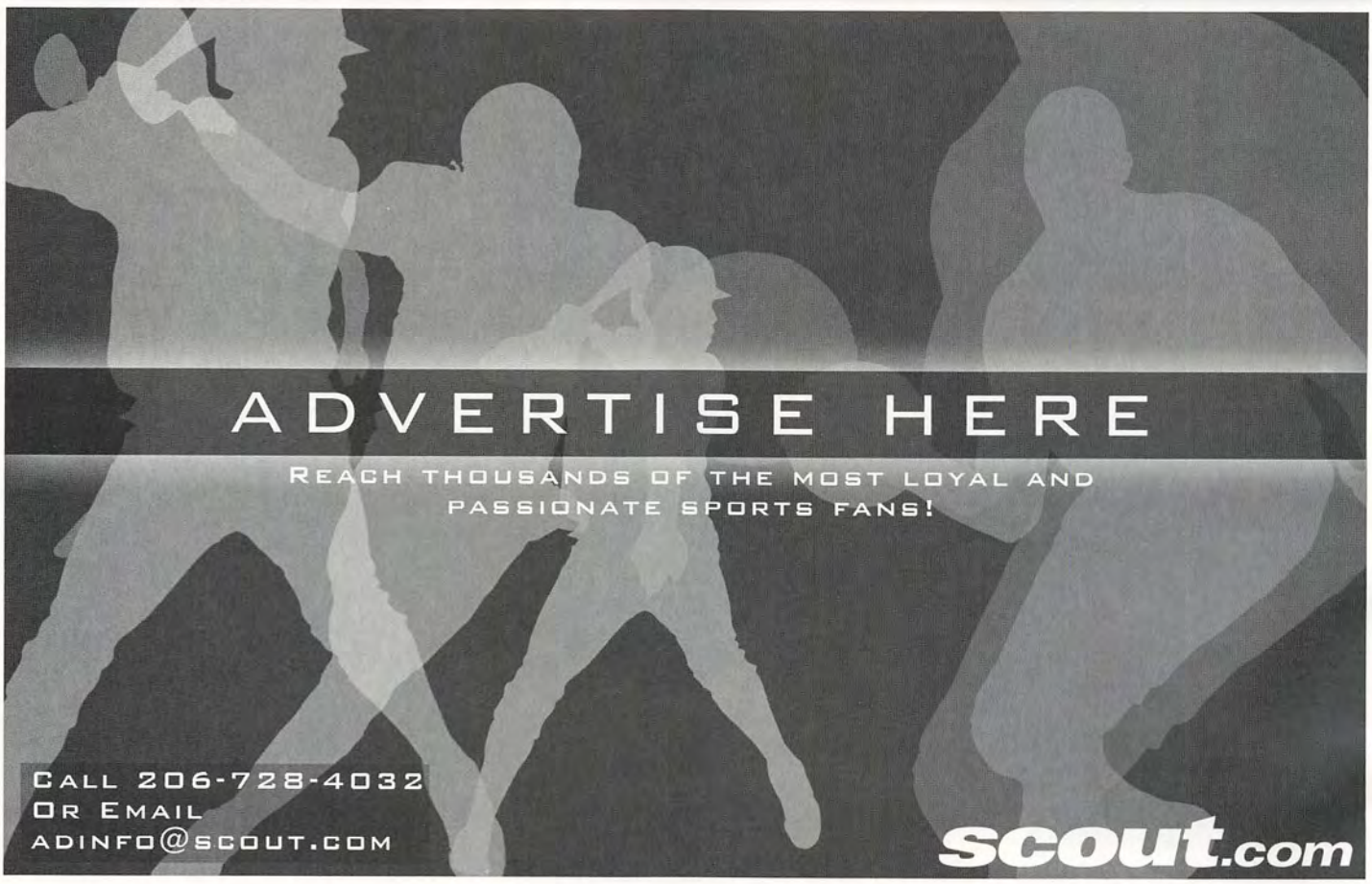
Softball Coach Patrick Murphy

University of Alabama

2007 Alabama Softball Roster

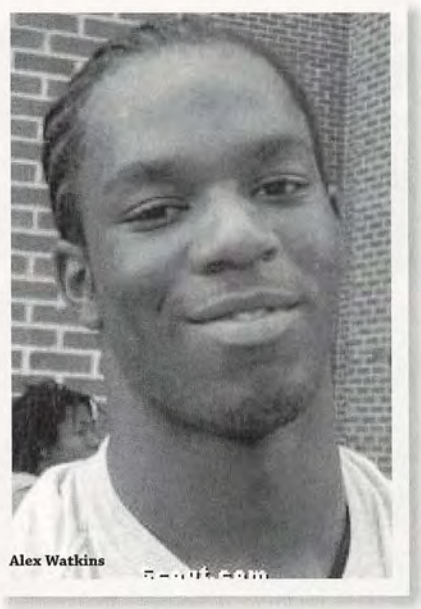
No	Name	Pos	B/T	Ht	Yr	Hometown
1	Mallory Benak	OF	R/R	5-6	Sr	Dothan
2	Jordan Praytor	UT	L/R	5-5	Jr	Vancouver, Wash.
3	Mandy Burford	IF	R/R	5-4	Sr	Anniston
4	Katie Johnson	C/OF	R/R	5-9	Jr	New Brunsfels, Texas
5	Jessica Smith	UT	R/R	5-5	Fr	Pell City
6	Ashley Holcombe	C	R/R	5-6	So	Fayetteville, Ga.
7	Chrissy Owens	P	R/R	6-0	Jr	Miami, Fla.
8	Brittany Rogers	OF	L/R	5-6	So	Dacula, Ga.
10	Kelly Montalvo	UT	R/R	5-0	So	Miami, Fla.
11	Blair Potter	P	R/L	5-8	Sr	Columbus, Ga.
13	Alex Blewitt	3B	R/R	5-11	Fr	Archbald, Pa.
14	Michelle Menningmann	UT	R/R	5-8	Sr	Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.
16	Kellie Eubanks	IF	R/R	6-0	So	Prarieville, La.
17	Lauren Parker	IF	L/R	5-4	So	Port Neches, Texas
21	Allison Moore	P	R/R	5-11	So	Tuscaloosa
22	Kellie Deska	C	R/R	5-9	Sr	Lake Jackson, Texas
23	Dani Woods	IF	L/L	5-5	Jr	Cockeysville, Md.
34	Charlotte Morgan	P/UT	R/L	5-10	Fr	Moreno Valley, Calif.

HEAD COACH: Patrick Murphy
ASSISTANT COACHES: Alyson Habetz and Vann Stuedeman



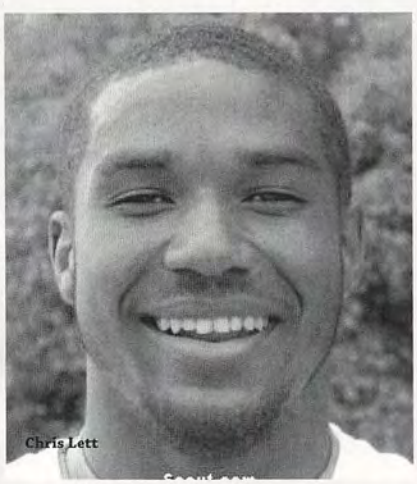
PREP PROSPECTS

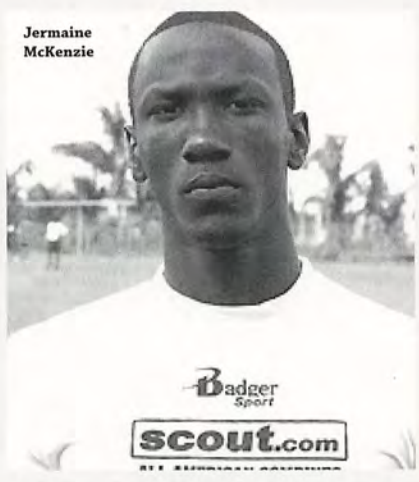
Coaching change has committed players thinking


Alex Watkins

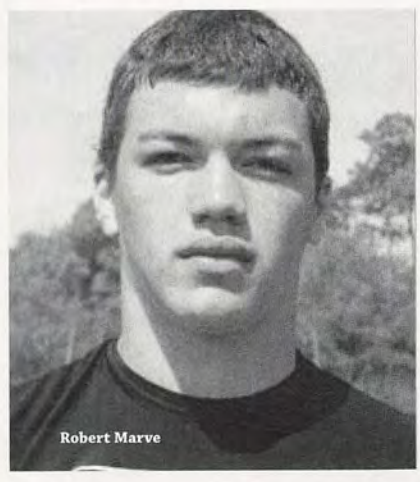
Jamar Taylor

Kourtnei Brown


Chris Lett



Jermaine McKenzie


Robert Marve

PHOTOS: Scout.com

The firing of Mike Shula as Alabama's head football coach had some prospects who had committed to the Crimson Tide questioning their decisions. Others committed to Bama, though, said they had committed to the school, not the coach, and continue to be headed to Tuscaloosa.

Signing Day is February 7.

As would be expected, there is more difficulty into holding on to out-of-state players who have made non-binding verbal pledges than it is to keep the in-state prospects. It is common for an in-state player to have grown up a fan of the school, perhaps been a regular visitor to games and/or the campus.

The Shula name is well known in Florida, and Alabama had a lot of success recruiting the sunshine state. He landed receivers D.J. Hall, Keith Brown and Will Oakley in his first class. The second year he recruited a trio of outstanding running backs in Roy Upchurch, Glen Coffee and Mike Ford. (Ford, now enrolled at Copiah-Lincoln Community College after a year at Hargrave Academy, hopes to make it to The Capstone.) In 2006 kick returner Javier Arenas was discovered by Alabama's staff. Marcus Udell (enrolled at Copiah-Lincoln), Marquis Johnson, and Charlie Kirschman were also part of the class.

Shula had put together one of his best classes thus far from the state of Florida. Scout.com four-star quarterback Robert Marve has proven with his senior year performance to be one of the best signal callers in the South. Scout.com four-star wide receiver Jermaine McKenzie and safety Chris Lett had great senior campaigns. Cornerback Sherod Murdock and running back Jamar Taylor are other verbal commitments to the Shula staff from the Sunshine State.

Marve from, Plant High School in Tampa, finished an undefeated season with a Class 4A state championship and broke records in the process. He set the state touchdown passing record with 47 and most completions with 265. Since Shula's firing Marve has re-opened his recruitment.

"I'm going to have to weigh everything out and see what's best for me," Marve said. "I'm going to look at some other schools and see what happens. Coach Shula was a big factor for me. He's a good, nice guy, and I really appreciate how he treated me."

Jermaine McKenzie, from Bradenton Prep, knew the coach he didn't want to play for at Alabama. When Rich Rodriguez was "close" to accepting the Tide head coaching position McKenzie had his opinion.

"I don't think I fit into his type of offense," McKenzie said. Rodriguez did not become Alabama's new coach. "I'm still committed to Alabama, but I'm starting to look at other options--open things up," McKenzie said before Bama named a coach. He then showed what kind of commitment that is by announcing that he would consider both Miami and Ole Miss, and then committing to Miami. The Hurricanes possibly offered a package deal with his brother, Tremaine, which Alabama did not.

Safety Chris Lett, from Pensacola said, "I am still 100 per cent committed to Alabama. It doesn't really matter to me who the coach is."

Lakeland running back Jamar Taylor finished his season with a Class 5A state championship and rushed for over 1,000 yards. Taylor remains a verbal commitment to the Tide, but the fate of one Alabama assistant coach may cause him to reconsider.

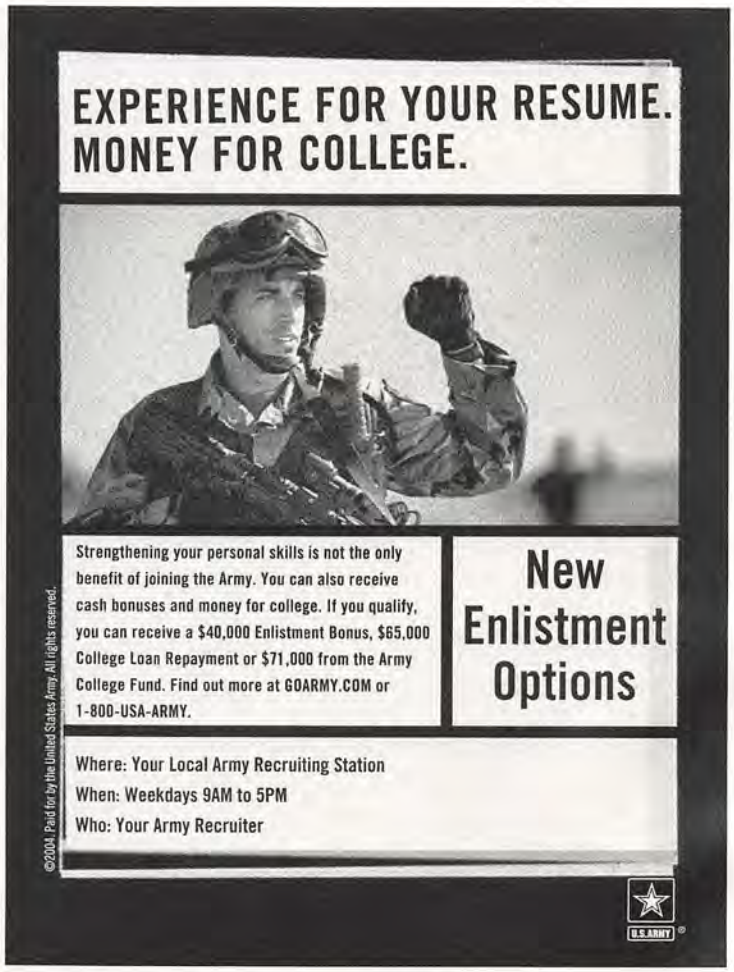
"Right now my commitment to Alabama is still real strong," Taylor said. "I want to see who the new coach is going to be. Coach (Chris) Ball is my coach. If Coach Ball leaves I don't think I will go to Alabama."

Scout.com three-star defensive lineman LaMarcus Williams from Bastrop, Louisiana, remains a solid verbal commitment to Alabama. He said he would wait to meet the new coaching staff before deciding if he will visit other schools.

"I feel like they would not make the move unless they had somebody great in hand," Williams said. "I am going to let it unfold and see what happens. Right now, I am still solid with Alabama, but schools like Arkansas, LSU, Ole Miss, and Colorado have been saying some good things."

Defensive end Alex Watkins, from Brownsville, Tennessee, Haywood isn't shy about expressing his feelings for the coaching change. "I hate it," he said. Watkins committed to Alabama during the summer following his performance at the Tide's senior mini-camp. He remains solid to Alabama. "I am still true to Alabama," he said. "I am opening up my options, but it's pretty much Alabama. It's only in case the coach doesn't like me."

Linebacker Jennings Hester, from Marist High School in Atlanta is another who plans to stick with his commitment to Alabama following


EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR RESUME.
MONEY FOR COLLEGE.
Strengthening your personal skills is not the only benefit of joining the Army. You can also receive cash bonuses and money for college. If you qualify, you can receive a $40,000 Enlistment Bonus, $65,000 College Loan Repayment or $71,000 from the Army College Fund. Find out more at GOARMY.COM or 1-800-USA-ARMY.
New Enlistment Options
Where: Your Local Army Recruiting Station
When: Weekdays 9AM to 5PM
Who: Your Army Recruiter
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the coaching change. "It's not going to alter my plans," he said. "I wish he (Shula) could have stayed around. I really liked Coach Shula. We had a good relationship. But I am sure Alabama will find a good coach. We'll be fine."

Defensive end Kourtnei Brown, from Victory Christian in Charlotte, North Carolina, has re-opened his recruitment. Brown was not highly-recruted until Alabama offered him, but has received offers from Clemson, Tennessee and Wake Forest since his verbal commitment to Alabama. He visited Clemson several times during the regular season and plans to take all his official visits. "I really don't have a leader," he said. "I'm not sure where I would sign if today were signing day."

The in-state prospects were bombarded daily with news of the dismissal and search for a replacement.

Scout.com four-star linebacker Rolando McClain of Decatur grew up dreaming of playing for Alabama. He said, "I like Alabama, but more importantly I would like to play for Coach (Joe) Kines."

Prattville defensive lineman Nick Gentry, following an emotional Class 6A state championship victory over Hoover, discussed the situation. "Right now I am a soft verbal commitment to Alabama," Gentry said. "With the coaching change I am not sure if Alabama is the right place for me anymore. I am still going to visit them. I am also going to visit Florida State, Louisville and Penn State."

Scout.com three-star defensive lineman Alfred McCullough of Athens had considered taking other official visits, then said he wouldn't visit other schools because he was solid to Alabama. That was before the coaching change. And after the change? "I am going to Alabama," McCullough said. "I am still a solid verbal commitment."

Alabama has three grayshirt verbal commitments. Offensive linemen William Vlachos, from Birmingham-Mountain Brook, and Hoover offensive lineman Patrick Crump have both re-affirmed their solid commitment to Alabama. Scout.com three-star safety Elliott McGaskin, from Mobile-B.C. Rain, remains a soft verbal pledge, but plans to take all five of his official visits before a final decision. ■

Nick Gentry

Alfred McCullough

PHOTOS: Scout.com

What Really Matters?

Following the dismissal of Mike Shula, and before Alabama had a new head football coach, there was some obvious dissatisfaction with the Crimson Tide among some prospects, particularly those in Florida. Every year a number of college football teams change their head coaches (and, usually, most of the staff of assistants) with little or no negative effect on recruiting.

That is not to say the loss of the Shula or the hiring of a new coach won't cost Bama some signees. On the other hand, it is possible the change could have a positive effect.

The major influences on football prospects choosing a college are varied, as they are for any student choosing a college.

Generally speaking, according to surveys over the past 30 years or so, the head coach ranks relatively low in importance as to why a prospect chooses a school. That's why following a coaching change, there is little or no attrition from those who had committed previously.

An exception to that would be if a school had someone of the stature of Paul Bryant. Some prospects chose Alabama for the chance to play for Coach Bryant, but that is a rarity.

Of more importance and something that could come into play is the recruiting coach and/or position coach. Prospects are usually closer to those. But even if that is the case, it is not necessarily valid. If a prospect really wants to play for Coach Joe Kines, for instance, it does him no good to decommit from Alabama and commit to, say, Florida State. Joe Kines isn't going to be at Florida State, either.

The coach ranks behind such factors as the opportunity for playing time (far and away the top factor), the likelihood of the team being on television, facilities, geography (being close to home), and the player being a lifelong fan of a certain school.

Coaches do rank ahead of academic curriculum in the minds of prospects.

It is not unreasonable to suspect that a prospect who changes his commitment or even reopens his options was looking for a reason to decommit and the coaching change is an excuse, not a reason.

Also to be kept in mind is that there is nowhere for a prospect to go in December or January. Signing Day is not until February 7.

The prospects knew that after Shula was dismissed as Alabama's head football coach that Bama would hire a new head coach. Most would simply wait to see who the new coach (and his assistants) are.

A prospect who wanted to go to Alabama when he committed probably had a number of reasons for doing so. Most of those reasons–from being a lifelong fan to the ranking of the chemistry department –are still in place.

Finally, Alabama has a limited number of scholarships. This is not a game. A prospect who announces that he is reconsidering his commitment should also realize that the commitment is a two-way street. If he is no longer committed, the Crimson Tide may no longer be committed to him, and that could mean that if the prospect finally elects to return to Bama, there may not be a scholarship available.

While serving as interim head coach in preparation for the Independence Bowl, Kines said the staff had continued to do a good job. "It has always been a good recruiting staff and they are out there now where people are shooting bullets at them," Kines said of Tide coaches having to battle the attacks of rival recruiters while Bama was without a head coach.

Kines said none of the prospects previously committed to Alabama had said "count me out." But, he said, about half had said they are still committed and about half had said they intend to wait to see how the coaching search works out before affirming their commitments. "But," Kines stressed, "none have said to count them out."

He said Tide coaches were not offering any prospects other than those already committed. He said there were "five, six, eight players we would offer right now, but we're trying to hold what we have." Presumably the staff will wait for a new head coach before making new offers. ■

–Kirk McNair

Alabama Football Hot List

Wednesday, February 7, 2007, is Football Signing Day. While Alabama already has a large number of prospects committed, the work likely will not be done until the final week. Here are some prospects who have been identified with Alabama, although–to be sure–this is not Alabama's official recruiting list. There are some on this list who will not be recruited by Alabama, and there are players not on this list who will be recruited by the Crimson Tide.

Name	Pos	Hgt	Wgt	40-time	Hometown (High School)
Allen Bailey	DE	6-4	245	4.8	Darien, Ga. (McIntosh Co. Academy)
Ricardo Bates	DB	5-11	170	4.5	Prattville
Jonathan Beasley	LB	6-2	215	4.7	Montgomery (Jeff Davis)
John Brown	DT	6-1	285	N/A	Lakeland, Fla.
*Kourtnei Brown	DE	6-5	210	4.6	Charlotte, N.C. (Victory Christian)
Justin Byrd	S	6-2	185	4.6	Chatom (Washington Co)
Nate Carlson	WR	6-3	205	4.56	Birmingham (Briarwood Christian)
Brandon Clear	WR	6-4	206	4.4	Williamsburg, Va. (Jamestown)
Sidell Corley	DE	6-4	250	4.8	Mobile (McGill-Toolen)
Josh Cragin	LB	6-2	215	N/A	Ft Walton Bch, Fla. (Choctawhatchee)
*Patrick Crump	OL	6-3	280	N/A	Birmingham (Hoover)
Jeffrey Daniels	LB	6-2	230	4.8	Brantley
Michael DeJohn	LB	6-0	220	4.7	Birmingham (Hoover)
Sam Edwards	WR	6-2	175	4.55	Pinson (Clay-Chalkville)
Terrell Edwards	RB	6-2	210	4.6	Mobile (UMS Wright)
Mark Fisher	OG-DE	6-4	280	5.3	Madison, Tenn. (Goodpasture)
Stephon Francois	S	6-2	215	4.5	Reserve, La. (E. St. John)
Lydarius Friend	WR	6-4	205	4.6	New Market (Buckhorn)
*Nick Gentry	DT	6-3	270	4.78	Prattville
Chip Ghigna	QB	6-3	204	4.7	Homewood
Brandon Gibson	WR	6-2	190	4.55	Mobile (UMS Wright)
Corey Hart	S-WR	6-2	203	4.6	Loachapoka
Austin Hayes	OL	6-3	240	5.0	Cedar Bluff
Lionel Henderson	OL	6-4	280	4.94	Mobile (Davidson)
Rashad Henry	CB	5-10	165	4.4	Lumberton, Miss.
*Jennings Hester	LB	6-3	215	4.7	Atlanta (Marist)
Herschel Houston	LB-RB	6-0	220	4.6	Centre (Cherokee Co.)
Darrius Jackson	DT	5-10	224	4.9	Fairfield
Nathan Jew	RB	5-10	193	4.55	Jackson, Miss. (Jackson Academy)
Jamie Jones	LB	6-0	215	N/A	Springdale, Ark.
Dennis King	RB	5-7	175	4.45	Hoover
*Chris Lett	S	6-1	210	4.6	Pensacola, Fla. (Pensacola)
*Robert Marve	QB	6-2	190	4.7	Tampa, Fla. (Plant)
*Rolando McClain	LB	6-4	230	4.68	Decatur
*Alfred McCullough	DT	6-3	297	5.1	Athens
*Elliott McGaskin	S	6-1	190	4.5	Mobile (B.C. Rain)
Michael McNeil	S-WR	6-2	197	4.5	Mobile (Davidson)
Travis Means	DB	5-10	175	N/A	Mobile (Davidson)
*Sherod Murdock	CB	6-0	175	4.5	Tampa, Fla. (Middleton)
Kerry Murphy	DT	6-4	300	5.1	Birmingham (Hoover)
Darnell Ratcliff	RB	5-11	187	4.5	Chicago (King)
Rico Sharpe	RB	6-0	190	4.5	Trussville (Hewitt-Trussville)
Zack Shaw	WR	6-2	190	4.6	Montgomery (Trinity Presbyterian)
Christian Smith	WR	6-2	210	4.5	Birmingham (Huffman)
E.J. Smith	WR	6-1	185	4.5	Camden, Miss. (Velma Jackson)
Marquez Strickland	WR	6-2	195	4.55	Opelika
Golden Tate	WR	6-0	180	4.4	Hendersonville, Tenn. (John Paul II)
*Jamar Taylor	RB	5-10	205	4.6	Lakeland, Fla. (Lakeland)
Caleb Thomas	OL	6-3	290	5.4	Decatur
*William Vlachos	OL	6-2	300	5.1	Mountain Brook
Jamison Wadley	DE	6-4	240	4.75	Attalla (Etowah)
Chris Walker	LB	6-2	240	4.6	Memphis (Christian Bros.)
Dallas Walker	QB	6-5	201	4.75	Madison, Miss., (Ridgeland Acad.)
*Alex Watkins	DE	6-4	225	4.6	Brownsville, Tenn. (Haywood)
*LaMarcus Williams	DT	6-1	285	5.0	Bastrop, La. (Bastrop)
Ryan Williams	CB	5-11	185	4.48	Mobile (B.C. Rain)
Darius Young	WR	6-1	205	N/A	Shannon, Miss.

***Committed to Alabama**

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Recently-honored Paul Crane still bleeds crimson and white

Paul Crane is now 62-years-old and he still plays a little football–yes, literally, a little football. It's usually at night just before he and his wife, Heike, nod off to sleep. "When I was playing football at Alabama, I had this little football that you wound up and it played the Alabama fight song," the Prichard native said. "I still have it today, and it's real special to me. I've got it right next to the bed and I'll play it just to make my wife suffer."

No doubt, the music box rendition of "Yea, Alabama!" conjures up some fond memories for Crane, who played during the 1960s Alabama football heyday. Crane, an All-America center and linebacker, played on the Tide's back-to-back national championship teams in 1964 and 1965 and played on Alabama's 9-2 team in 1963.

Much has been made of Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant's Junction pre-season camp when he was at Texas A&M. At Alabama, Crane remembers the Bryant staff being extremely tough and demanding, though it may not have been equal to the rigors of Junction.

"Most of us didn't quit, though, because we didn't have anywhere to go if we left," Crane said. "Plus, we were all sold on trying to win a national championship. That was our goal. For me, it was just one of those things where you're in the right place at the right time. We all just had perseverance, dedication and an unwillingness to lose."

One instance Crane remembers when he wasn't in the right place at the right time was when teammate Al Lewis accidentally shattered Crane's nose with his elbow during practice. Crane was a freshman at the time.

"I had to stick my fingers up in my nose so I could breathe," Crane said. "(Teammate) Jimmy Carroll helped me straighten it out. But then I got back in there and it barely got touched and ended up on the side of my face again. Finally, one of the members of the coaching staff got a couple of cotton balls to stick in there to keep it from slipping out of shape again. I guess the funny part was that one of the upperclassmen had the same thing happen to his nose a little bit later and the staff went all out to fix his nose for him. Meanwhile, all I got was a couple of cotton balls. Freshmen didn't rate very high back then."

Crane, though, doesn't want too much pity.

"There were a lot of people who had some pretty rough things happen to them," he said. "Plus, as the saying goes, you don't run on your nose."

Playing alongside stars like Joe Namath, Steve Sloan, Steve Bowman and Ray Perkins also was something Crane will never forget. In the 1965 game against Ole Miss, Alabama staged a stirring, late-game 90-yard scoring drive to pull out a 17-16 victory. Bowman was the worn-out workhorse on the drive.

"We ran him to death," Crane said. "He'd be in the huddle panting and then we'd turn around and give it to him again. I'll never forget how much effort Bowman put into his play. After the game was over, he probably couldn't have run another 10 yards. That's how much we used him."

Crane, according to Carroll, certainly did his part in helping open up holes for Bowman.

"He was just an outstanding player, no doubt," Carroll said. "He wasn't real big, but he played a lot bigger than he was."

A lot of it had to do with the way Crane prepared himself.

"Paul had a great work ethic," Carroll said. "He was one of those guys who practiced hard and played hard and tried to improve every day. One of his greatest qualities was his leadership ability. He wasn't a rah-rah guy, but he led by example. He inspired others around him to play at a high level."

After his senior season, Crane played in the Senior Bowl and caught the eyes of the New York Jets coaching staff that was in charge of the South team. The Jets offered Crane a free-agent contract, and he accepted.

"Coach Bryant probably bribed them to do it," Crane joked.

Crane played eight years with the Jets, from 1966 to 1973, before retiring in 1974 because of a bad knee.

"It was an unbelievable experience, especially for a skinny kid from Alabama," Crane said of his professional career in New York. "Just being there with my old Alabama teammate Joe Namath and everyone else on the team made me feel lucky just to be there. And then to win Super Bowl III–whenever you can get to a point like that, that's just the apex of your career. That game against the Colts still stands out as one of the greatest games ever in the history of football, and to know that I was a part of that is wonderful."

So did Crane have any input in Namath's famous pre-game guarantee that the underdog Jets would take down the mighty Colts?

"No, he did all that on his own," Crane said. "He was bold, brash and good. But the thing is, we had watched a lot of film on the Colts and we had played Oakland for the AFL championship, and we all felt like Oakland was a better team than Baltimore. That's why Namath could say what he said."

Winning the Super Bowl capped a unique championship trifecta for Crane. His high school football team won the state championship, his college team won two national championships and his professional team won the Super Bowl.

"Yeah, it amazes me the path I was on,"

Paul Crane was outstanding center and linebacker

University of Alabama

Crane said. "That's just how life goes sometimes. A twitch here or a twitch there and maybe all that success doesn't happen."

After his NFL career, Crane served as an assistant coach first on Alabama's staff for four years and then on Ole Miss' staff for three years.

"I enjoyed being on Coach Bryant's staff," Crane said. "He was a great person and, obviously, a great coach. Probably the biggest mistake I made was going to Ole Miss. Coach Bryant tried to talk me out of it but I had already made up my mind. I should have listened to Coach Bryant. We weren't successful at Ole Miss, so finally I just decided to try something else."

After a stint as the head coach at McGill-Toolen High School, Crane, who lives in Mobile, got involved with the Catholic Youth Organization for the archdiocese of Mobile and has now been with the organization since 1984. The organization, rooted in Catholic values, aims to provide training, resources and consultation to parish communities through activities like athletics, camping and youth ministry. Crane currently serves as executive director of the Mobile branch.

"It's a real pleasure," he said. "I get to be around all kinds of sports, like football, soccer, volleyball, basketball and golf, and we have so many kids involved."

Carroll believes the organization could not have picked a better man to lead it.

"Paul has great character and he displays a lot of class," Carroll said. "CYO is very fortunate to have someone of his stature leading up that program. The kids can learn a lot just by watching him as a person."

This fall, Paul Crane was selected to bring the game ball to midfield for the start of the game, an Alabama tradition honoring former Crimson Tide players. ■

EDITOR'S NOTE: Paul Crane is one of 62 former Alabama football players who tells his story of "What It Means To Be Crimson Tide," with foreword by Gene Stallings. 'BAMA Editor Kirk McNair is author of the book, which is available for $27.95 plus tax (if applicable) and shipping and handling by calling (205) 345-5074. Autograph by Kirk McNair is available.

'BAMA SCORECARD

Notebooking Crimson Tide Sports

What Goes Up...

There was Alabama men's basketball team back among the elite. Scout.com had Coach Mark Gottfried's Bama at number three in the nation. The Associated Press had Alabama number four, and the coaches' poll conducted by ESPN and USA Today said the Crimson Tide was number five. That was in early December, just before Bama took off for South Bend, Indiana, and a meeting with Notre Dame.

And the Tide came tumbling down. Notre Dame blasted Alabama out of the ranks of the undefeated and out of number one contention. But that doesn't mean a thing. A good thing about college basketball is that a tournament at the end of the season will determine the national champion. There is no reason Alabama can't be in that mix when tournament time rolls around in March.

Prior to the early polls this season, the last time Alabama was ranked among the Top 5 in the AP poll was when it was ranked fourth in the January 6, 2003 AP rankings. Bama has been ranked as high as number one in the nation, for two straight weeks, in the December 23, 2002 and December 30, 2002 AP rankings.

Jermareo Davidson

Everything had to be looking great for Jermareo Davidson as he prepared for his senior season of Alabama basketball. He was coming off a junior year in which he had earned All-Southeastern Conference and he was a pre-season All-America and Wooden Cup nominee. Additionally, he was on track to earn his degree from The University in May.

Then things went horribly wrong.

First his brother was critically wounded. On a rare off day, Jermareo and his girlfriend, Brandy Murphy, were driving to Atlanta to see Jermareo's brother in the hospital. The car left the road and Brandy, who was driving, was killed.

The tragedies had a naturally disruptive effect on Jermareo. As the first semester of his senior year was nearing an end, it was obvious Davidson had missed too much class work to have a successful academic period. As a result, he took advantage of special rules in place by the NCAA and the SEC.

In a statement released just before tipoff of Alabama's game against Alabama State in early December, Coach Mark Gottfried said "Jermareo obviously has had a very difficult last four weeks. Due to his missing some class time and institutional policy, Jermareo has been withdrawn from his current academic schedule. We are working alongside the SEC office and according to the SEC and NCAA guidelines we are anticipating that he will be fully re-instated in the next few days."

The re-instatement was accomplished in time for Davidson to participate in the next game.

The plan enables the semester to be wiped from the slate. Davidson had been expected to earn his degree in May. That is likely to be delayed.

Prior to this year, Gottfried has had 20 players who completed their athletic eligibility. All 20 have earned their degrees. Davidson is the only senior on this year's team.

Golf Gets An "A"

Two of the golf's most-respected publications have given the Alabama golf team high marks for its play in the fall.

On its website, www.golfweektv.com, Golf Week issued its mid-term reports on its link "Around Campus." The Crimson Tide is the highlighted team topping its list of "Overachievers" as its "story of the fall" in college golf. It gives Alabama an "A" for having a "great semester."

The Crimson Tide, coached by Jay Seawell and ranking number one in the Golf Coaches Association of America poll, won three of its five fall tournaments.

Golf World issued its "Mid-Season College Awards" for the first half of the collegiate season in late November, and Bama's Seawell won its "Mid-Season Coach of the Year" award.

Alabama's golf team is currently on hiatus. The college golf season is split into a fall season and a spring season, breaking in late November through late January when most courses around the country are unplayable due to the winter weather. Alabama opened the season by bulldozing through its first three tournaments, winning the team championships at all three. The spring seasons picks up at Sawgrass Country Club in Jacksonville, Florida, where Alabama will compete in the February 18-20 Mercedes Benz Intercollegiate.

High Low

The Alabama gymnastics team of Coach Sarah Patterson has been one of the nation's best for two and a half decades. It is never a surprise when Bama is listed among the elite of college teams, and 2007 is no exception. In the pre-season poll of gymnastics coaches, Alabama was ranked fourth in the nation. That's the good news.

The bad news? That ranking showed the Crimson Tide being only third in the SEC. The poll had defending national champion Georgia number one, followed by Florida and Utah.

Bama was third in last year's NCAA meet, behind Georgia and Utah.

In some respects this is a rebuilding year for Alabama, which lost five seniors, three of them All-America, and one of them–Ashley Miles–a national champion and one of the best ever in the sport.

Gold Medal Winner

Alabama senior swimming star Vlad Polyakov picked up some impressive medals while taking a break from collegiate competition in December. Polyakov participated in the Asian Games in Doha, Qatar, and won the 50-meter breaststroke.

Polyakov went out strong from lane 4 and was never headed, taking gold in a time of 28.29 seconds, nine hundredths of a second faster than Japanese sensation Kosuke Kitajima, the defending 100- and 200-meter breaststroke champion.

Polyakov's victory gave his native Kazakhstan only its second gold medal in the

pool, Alexei Hovrin having claimed the other in the men's 50 freestyle at the Asian Games of 1994 in Hiroshima, Japan.

Polyakov came back to take the bronze medal in the 100-meter breaststroke behind the Japanese duo of Kosuke Kitajima and Makoto Yamashita. Polyakov posted a 1:01.63, just .13 second behind Yamashita and a half second behind Kitajima, the defending Olympic 100- and 200-meter breaststroke champion.

The 200-meter breaststroke is the Crimson Tide standout's specialty. He has finished in the top two at the NCAA Championships each of his first three seasons at Alabama. He also won the 2006 World Championship in the event.

Sportsman

It is primarily because of the fame of Alabama athletics, and particularly Crimson Tide football, that the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame is, indeed, a hall of fame. This year the ASHOF will honor Bama Athletics Director Mal Moore as a Distinguished Alabama Sportsman. This is a special award given each year at the ASHOF banquet.

The ASHOF is under pressure to keep the awards somewhat balanced with Auburn. This year there are co-winners of the prestigious Distinguished Alabama Sportsman Award. Also selected is David Housel, former athletics director at Auburn.

The induction banquet will be Sunday, June 3, at the Sheraton Birmingham. Ticket information will be available later.

Other inductees are former Alabama football players Wilbur Jackson, Barry Krauss and Jerry Duncan; former Crimson Tide basketball player Buck Johnson; former Bama football and baseball player Al Lary (deceased); Gene Washington, Sonny Smith, and David Marsh.

Pate Honored

Alabama Men's Tennis Coach Billy Pate was one of 15 sectional winners of Community Service Awards presented by the United States Tennis Association and International Tennis Association.

The USTA/ITA award is given to coaches who make significant contributions in developing community-based tennis programs through community centers, schools, parks, community tennis associations, inner city, suburban or rural programs.

"We are extremely honored to have received an ITA award for any small contributions we have been able to make to the growth of tennis," said Pate. "Our players and our staff are very passionate about seeing new players introduced to our great sport. It is our hope that we can involve people to enjoy the many healthy attributes of tennis and make this an endeavor they will enjoy throughout their lives."

Pate and the Crimson Tide tennis team worked jointly with USTA Alabama and the Alabama High School Athletic Association to organize and direct a High School Coaches workshop. Some 50 high school tennis coaches attended as Pate, Assistant Coach Lee Nickell and Volunteer Coach Matt Hill presented on-court seminars for training high school players and running a team, which is now an annual event.

As a board member of the Tuscaloosa Tennis Association (TTA), Pate is helping direct efforts to build a public tennis facility in Tuscaloosa. The board has presented proposals to the city council and the Parks and Recreation Department to build a centralized public tennis center.

The Alabama men's team has conducted free tennis clinics for youth tennis programs. This past summer, they helped organize and participated in a week-long tennis clinic that introduced 225 new kids to the sport. Members of the staff and team also took part by volunteering their time to direct games and drills. They also trained people in the area on how to help teach basic skills for development at the grass roots level.

The Alabama staff has been working diligently to introduce campus-wide tennis program and promote rapid growth for the student body. Hill has worked alongside campus recreation directors to initiate new programs that have dramatically increased participation and league growth. Some events that have attracted new players included club tennis tournaments and a free clinic for students.

Pate was honored for his award at the ITA Coaches Convention in Miami in December.

Still Slugging

Former Alabama softball All-America Kelly Kretschman went 2-for-3 with two runs batted in to help lead the USA Softball Women's National team to a 7-0 victory over Japan in the championship game of the 2006 Japan Cup at Yokohama (Japan) Stadium.

The United States team came out strong with three runs in the first inning, including a RBI single by Kretschman. Two more runs in the second inning would push the lead to 5-0 for the U.S. Kretschman singled in Jessica Mendoza for the fifth run.

Kretschman was joined by Natasha Watley, Laura Berg and Mendoza with two hits each in the game. Monica Abbott allowed just two hits while striking out five to pick up the win on the mound.

The Japan Cup Championship was the third title of the year for the USA Softball team. They also captured titles at the II World Cup of Softball in Oklahoma City and the ISF Women's

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All-SEC

After earning the second NCAA Tournament berth in program history, the postseason honors continued to pile up for the University of Alabama volleyball team, as three of its members were included in the Southeastern Conference postseason teams.

Crystal Hudson earned first team All-SEC honors, Bridget Fuentez was named to the second team and Megan Hudson was included in the conference's Community Service team.

Crystal Hudson, a junior from Hueytown, finished her season as one of the most powerful hitters in the league. She converted .393 percent of her attack attempts and finished with 4.02 kills per game, ranking her 6th in the SEC. Hudson recorded her 1,000th kill in a win over Tennessee, becoming just the 10th player in school history to record the feat. She was named SEC and National Player of the Week during the season.

"Crystal has made enormous strides in her game this season," said Tide Coach Judy Green. "I think her determination after not making an all-conference team last year motivated her in the off-season, and the work she put in certainly showed this fall. She had one of the most consistent conference seasons as a middle blocker."

She also was named to the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA)All-South Region team

Fuentez, a junior outside hitter, earned second team All-SEC honors for the second time in as many seasons. She finished second on the team to Hudson in kills with 3.79 per game. She was second on the team with 286 digs and led the squad with 13 double-doubles.

"Bridget was able to overcome a slow start to the conference season," said Green. "That's a credit to how hard she worked after the first weekend of SEC play and how much time and effort she put in to raising her level of play. Bridget is so vital to our team and contributes to our program in every way. She had a strong finish and that was by her design."

A team co-captain, Megan Hudson has been a key contributor to the program, both on and off the floor. Hudson played in 87 of the team's 110 games, recording 4.41 digs per game. She has volunteered at several local organizations, including the Humane Society, the University Place Elementary school and at the University Halloween Extravaganza the past two seasons. Hudson is president of the Alabama Student Athlete Advisory Committee.

"Megan is a complete student-athlete who has great leadership qualities both on and off the volleyball court," said Green. "She is very giving and has a tremendous way of making people feel good about themselves. Her efforts in the community are things you can read about, but it's her personality that is the most magnetic thing about her."

The Crimson Tide made it to the NCAA Tournament for the second consecutive year, but was eliminated by Stephen F. Austin in the first round.

2007 Captains

Some sports wait until the end of their seasons to choose permanent captains. Alabama Soccer Coach Don Staley wants his captains providing leadership from the beginning. As a result, he has already named captains for the 2007 team, which will not begin competition until August.

Upcoming seniors Hayley MacDonald and Jordan O'Banion have been selected as the 2007 team captains.

"Jordan and Hayley are two individuals who lay it on the line in every practice and every game" Staley said. "As we move into our winter conditioning and spring season it is important for us to find the best leadership possible within this program. In early practices, injury rehabilitation, and all the things a team goes through to get ready for the season, mentally and physically, we will need their leadership. They are both committed to Alabama soccer and they hate to lose. So much of what we do depends on leadership within the team and I feel we have selected the best two."

O'Banion played in every game last season for the Crimson Tide after missing most of 2005 with a knee injury. She led Bama in points and goals last season, scoring 21 per cent of the Tide's goals. She started 20 games as a freshman in 2004 and led the Tide in points and goals. The senior from Carmel, Indiana, was also on the SEC Academic Honor Roll in 2004 and 2005.

"I am excited to be named captain," said O'Banion. "It is a great honor. We are already working very hard in the off season and looking forward to a new start in 2007 and getting this team back where we want to be."

MacDonald led all Tide field players in minutes last season while playing sweeper. She played in all 19 games logging 1,521 minutes. The senior from Ontario was also a team captain in 2006. She was named to the SEC Academic Honor Roll in 2004 and 2005.

MacDonald and O'Banion are two of the Tide's three seniors returning for next season. The Tide will return 19 players from the 2005 campaign, including eight starters.

Bama Sells

According to a release from the Collegiate Licensing Company of Atlanta, Alabama ranked seventh among the nation's universities represented by CLC in sales for the first quarter of the 2006-2007 fiscal year. These rankings represent royalties reported July 1, 2006 through September 30, 2006 on all collegiate merchandise sold.

Texas was first, followed by Notre Dame, Georgia, Michigan, Florida, North Carolina, Alabama, Penn State, Tennessee, and FSU.

The Collegiate Licensing Company, founded by former Alabama football player Bill Battle, is the oldest and largest collegiate licensing agency in the nation. CLC represents more than 180 collegiate properties, which include colleges and universities, bowl games, athletic conferences, The Bowl Championship Series, The Heisman Trophy, and the NCAA (including the Men's and Women's Final Four, the College World Series, and all NCAA Championships). ■

2007 Alabama Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Site
September 1	Western Carolina	Tuscaloosa
September 8	Vanderbilt	Nashville
September 15	Arkansas	Tuscaloosa
September 22	Georgia	Tuscaloosa
September 29	Florida State	Jacksonville
October 6	Houston	Tuscaloosa
October 13	Mississippi	Oxford
October 20	Tennessee	Tuscaloosa
October 27	Open	
November 3	LSU	Tuscaloosa
November 10	Mississippi State	Starkville
November 17	Louisiana-Monroe	Tuscaloosa
November 24	Auburn	Auburn
December 1	Southeastern Conference Championship Game	Atlanta

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2006-07 Alabama Winter Sports Schedules

Men's Basketball

Date	Opponent	*Time
Oct. 30	Crimson-White	7:00
Nov. 4	Montevallo (Exh.)	TBA
Nov. 10	Jackson State	7:30
Nov. 17-20	Paradise Jam @ St. Thomas	
(MTSU, Charleston, Iowa, Toledo, Villanova, VCU, Xavier)		
Nov. 25	Texas Southern	6:00
Nov. 28	Louisiana-Monroe	7:00
Dec. 2	Tennessee State	2:30
Dec. 7	@ Notre Dame	8:00
Dec. 9	Alabama State	6:00
Dec. 16	Southern Miss @ Mobile	6:00
Dec. 20	@ NC State	5:30
Dec. 23	Coppin State	2:00
Dec. 29	Lipscomb	7:00
Jan. 1	Oklahoma	1:30
Jan. 6	@ Arkansas	1:00

Date	Opponent	*Time
Jan. 10	LSU	7:00
Jan. 17	@ Vanderbilt	7:00
Jan. 20	Georgia	12:30
Jan. 23	@ Auburn	8:00
Jan. 27	Arkansas	2:00
Jan. 31	@ LSU	8:00
Feb. 3	South Carolina	2:00
Feb. 7	Mississippi State	7:00
Feb. 10	@ Ole Miss	4:00
Feb. 14	@ Florida	7:00
Feb. 17	Kentucky	2:00
Feb. 21	@ Tennessee	7:00
Feb. 24	Auburn	4:00
Feb. 28	Ole Miss	7:00
March 4	@ Mississippi State	1:00
March 8-11	SEC Tournament @ Georgia Dome, Atlanta	

Women's Basketball

Date	Opponent
Oct. 31	West Alabama (Exh.)
Nov. 6	Delta State (Exh.)
Nov. 10	Samford
Nov. 13	@ Arkansas State
Nov. 17	Tennessee Tech
Nov. 19	SE Louisiana
Nov. 24-25	St. Mary's Inv. @ San Francisco
(St. Mary's, Cal State-Northridge, Missouri)	
Nov. 29	UT-Chattanoga
Dec. 2	Savannah State
Dec. 4	McNeese State
Dec. 9	@ Tulane
Dec. 16	@ Louisiana Tech
Dec. 18	Birmingham Southern
Dec. 20	Belmont

Date	Opponent
Dec. 28	South Dakota State
Dec. 30	North Dakota State
Jan. 3	@ Tennessee
Jan. 7	Auburn
Jan. 11	Kentucky
Jan. 14	@ South Carolina
Jan. 18	@ Arkansas
Jan. 21	LSU
Jan. 28	Tennessee
Feb. 1	@ Auburn
Feb. 4	@ Vanderbilt
Feb. 8	Georgia
Feb. 11	@ Ole Miss
Feb. 18	Florida
Feb. 22	Mississippi State
Feb. 25	@ LSU

Smimming & Diving

Date	Opponent
Oct. 13	Intrasquad Meet
Oct. 14	Alumni Meet
Oct. 20-21	Dallas (Texas) Morning News Meet
Oct. 20	Delta State
Nov. 10	LSU/Arkansas (W) @ Baton Rouge
Nov. 17	Auburn
Nov. 30-	US Open
Dec. 3	@ Purdue
Jan. 13	@ Kentucky
Jan. 20	Florida/South Carolina
Feb. 2-4	SEC Diving Championships @ Lexington

Date	Opponent
Feb. 7-10	SEC Swimming Championships @ Lexington
Feb. 17	Last Chance (W) @ Athens
Feb. 24	Last Chance (M) @ Auburn
March 2-4	NCAA Zone Diving
March 8-10	NCAA Women's Championships @ Minneapolis
March 15-17	NCAA Men's Championships @ Minneapolis
March 26-April 1	USA Swimming Nationals @ Garden City, N.Y.

Gymnastics

Date	Opponent	*Time
Jan. 12	Oklahoma	7:30
Jan. 19	@ Florida	7:00
Jan. 26	Auburn	7:30
Feb. 2	Kentucky	7:30
Feb. 10	@ Georgia	4:00
Feb. 16	@ Arkansas	7:00
Feb. 23	North Carolina	7:30
March 2	LSU	7:30
March 9	UCLA	7:30
March 16	@ Auburn	7:00
March 31	SEC Championships @ Fayetteville	
April 14	NCAA Regionals @ Tuscaloosa	
Aprill 26	NCAA Championships @ Salt Lake City, Utah	

Track & Field

Jan. 12-13	@ Kentucky Invitational
Jan. 19-20	@ Clemson Invitational (W)
Jan. 19-20	@ Indiana Classic (M)
Feb. 2-3	Armorny Invitational @ New York (W)
Feb. 2-3	@ Notre Dame Invitational (M)
Feb. 9-10	@ Iowa State Invitational
Feb. 23-25	SEC Championships at Lexington
March 2-3	Last Chance @ Notre Dame
March 9-10	NCAA Championships @ Fayetteville

*Central time

2006-07 Alabama Winter Sports Schedules

Baseball

Date	Opponent	*Time
Feb. 9	Georgia State	6:30
Feb. 10	Georgia State	4:00
Feb. 11	Georgia State	2:00
Feb. 14	Troy	6:30
Feb. 16	Canisius	6:30
Feb. 17	Canisius	4:00
Feb. 18	Canisius	11:00
Feb. 23	Villanova	6:30
Feb. 24	Villanova	1:00
Feb. 25	Villanova	11:00
Feb. 28	UAB	3:00
March 2	McNeese State	6:30
March 3	McNeese State	4:00
March 4	McNeese State	2:00
March 6	Southern Miss @ Jackson	6:30
March 7	Tennessee Tech	6:30
March 9	Nebraska	6:30
March 10	Nebraska	4:00
March 11	Nebraska	11:00
March 14	@ Samford	6:00
March 16	Tennessee	6:30
March 17	Tennessee	4:00
March 18	Tennessee	2:00
March 20	Mississippi Valley	6:30
March 21	Mississippi Valley	3:00
March 23	@ Ole Miss	6:30
March 24	@ Ole Miss	4:00
March 25	@ Ole Miss	2:00
March 30	LSU	6:30
March 31	LSU	4:00
April 1	LSU	2:00
April 4	UAB @ Hoover	6:30
April 6	@ Vanderbilt	7:00
April 7	@ Vanderbilt	4:00
April 8	@ Vanderbilt	1:30
April 11	SE Louisiana	6:30
April 13	Georgia	6:30
April 14	Georgia	4:00
April 15	Georgia	2:00
April 18	South Alabama	6:30
April 20	@ Auburn	6:30
April 21	@ Auburn	2:00
April 22	@ Auburn	1:00
April 25	Samford	6:30
April 27	South Carolina	6:30
April 28	South Carolina	4:00
April 29	South Carolina	2:00
May 4	@ Florida	7:00
May 5	@ Floria	4:00
May 6	@ Florida	12:30
May 11	Arkansas	6:30
May 12	Arkansas	4:00
May 13	Arkansas	2:00
May 17	@ Mississippi State	7:00
May 18	@ Mississippi State	7:00
May 19	@ Mississippi State	2:00
May 24-27	SEC Tournament @ Hoover	
June 1-4	NCAA Regionals	
June 8-11	NCAA Super Regionals	
June 15-23	College World Series @ Omaha	

Softball

Date	Opponent	*Time
Texas State Tournament @ San Marcos		
Feb. 9-11	Oklahoma State, Texas-San Antonio, Texas State	
Bama Bash		
Feb. 16-18	Michigan State, Radford, Toledo	
Crimson Classic		
Feb. 23-25	Indiana State, North Carolina State, Winthrop	
Feb. 28	@ Samford Easton Spring Fling	6:30
March 2-4	Louisiana Lafayette, Seton Hall	
March 10	Mississippi State (DH)	1:00
March 11	Mississippi State	1:30
March 14	@ Florida (DH)	5:00
March 17	@ South Carolina (DH)	1:00
March 18	@ South Carolina	1:00
March 21	Arkansas (DH)	5:00
March 24	@ LSU (DH)	1:00
March 25	@ LSU	1:00
March 27	Louisiana Tech (DH)	4:00
March 31	Georgia (DH)	1:00
April 1	Georgia	1:30
April 3	Northwestern St	5:00
April 3	Florida Atlantic	7:00
April 6	Auburn (DH)	5:00
April 7	Auburn	2:00
April 11	Chattanooga (DH)	4:00
April 17	Mercer @ Oxford	6:30
April 21	@ Ole Miss (DH)	1:00
April 22	@ Ole Miss	1:00
April 24	Troy	6:00
April 28	Kentucky (DH)	1:00
April 29	Kentucky	1:30
May 5	@ Tennessee (DH)	1:00
May 6	@ Tennessee	1:00
May 10-12	SEC Tournament @ Auburn	
May 18-20	NCAA Regionals	
May 25-26	NCAA Super Regionals	
May 31-June 6	Women's College World Series @ Oklahoma City	

Men's Golf

Date	Event
Feb. 18-20	Mercedes-Benz @ Sawgrass
Feb. 25-27	Puerto Rico Classic
March 17-18	Chris Schenkle @ Statesboro, Ga.
April 9-11	U.S. Collegiate @ Alpharetta, Ga.
April 20-22	SEC Championships @ Sea Island, Ga.
May 13-14	Linger Longer @ Greensboro, Ga.
May 17-18	NCAA Regionals
May 30-June 2	NCAA Tournament @ Williamsburg, Va.

Women's Golf

Date	Event
Feb. 23-25	Lady Puerto Rico Classic
March 5-6	@ Central Florida Invitational
March 16-18	@ LSU Cleveland Classic
March 23-25	Liz Murphey @ Athens, Ga.
April 20-22	SEC Championships @ West Point, Miss.
May 10-12	NCAA Regionals
May 22-25	NCAA Tournament @ Daytona Beach, Fla.

Women's Track

Date	Event
March 23-25	Alabama Relays
March 30-31	@ Stanford Invitational
April 7	@ Auburn Invitational
April 13-15	Mt. Sac Relays @ Long Beach
April 20-21	@ Vanderbilt Invitational
April 26-28	Drake Relays @ Des Moines
May 10-13	SEC Championships
May 25-26	NCAA Regionals
June 7-10	NCAA Championships @ Sacremento

Men's Track

Date	Event
March 23-25	Alabama Relays
March 30-31	@ Stanford Invitational
April 5-7	@ Texas Relays @ Austin
April 14	@ Arizona State
April 20-21	@ LSU Invitational
April 26-28	Drake Relays @ Des Moines
May 9-10	SEC Championships
May 25-26	NCAA Regionals
June 7-10	NCAA Championships @ Sacremento

Men's Tennis

Date	Opponent	*Time
Jan. 18-27	SEC Indoors @ New Orleans	
Jan. 27	Troy	10:00
Jan. 27	Jacksonville State	3:00
Feb. 4	Virginia	12:00
Feb. 10	Furman	9:00
Feb. 10	Winthrop	5:00
Feb. 16	Clemson	12:00
Feb. 23	@ Princeton	3:00
Feb. 24	@ Columbia	2:00
March 2	@ Vanderbilt	2:00
March 4	@ Kentucky	1:00
March 9	Ole Miss	2:00
March 11	Mississippi State	1:00
March 15-18	Blue-Gray @ Montgomery	
March 23	@ Tennessee	3:00
March 25	Georgia	1:00
March 30	Florida	3:00
April 1	South Carolina	1:00
April 6	@ LSU	2:00
April 8	@ Arkansas	1:00
April 11	Samford	1:00
April 11	UAB	6:00
April 14	@ Auburn	5:00
April 19-22	SEC Tournament @ LSU	

Women's Tennis

Date	Opponent	*Time
Jan. 19-21	@ Virginia Invitational	
Jan. 27	Oregon @ Lubbock, Texas	12:00
Jan. 28	@ Texas Tech	10:00
Feb. 3	Colorado	6:00
Feb. 9	Furman	4:00
Feb. 11	Iowa	11:00
Feb. 16	Chattanooga	6:00
Feb. 24	Oklahoma	12:00
March 2	Vanderbilt	4:00
March 4	Kentucky	1:00
March 9	@ Ole Miss	4:00
March 11	@ Mississippi State	1:00
March 14	Washington State	3:00
March 17	@ Michigan	6:00
March 23	Tennessee	4:00
March 25	@ Georgia	1:00
March 30	@ Florida	5:00
April 1	@ South Carolina	1:00
April 6	LSU	4:00
April 8	Arkansas	1:00
April 14	Auburn	12:00
April 19-22	SEC Tournament @ Kentucky	
May 11-13	NCAA Regionals	
May 19-28	NCAA Championships @ Georgia	

*Central time

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ALABAMA CRIMSON TIDE

2006–2007 HOME BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

Date	Opponent	Location	Time
10/30/2006	Crimson/White Game	Tuscaloosa, AL	7:00 p.m.
11/4/2006	Montevallo (Exhibition)	Tuscaloosa, AL	5:00 p.m.
11/10/2006	Jackson State	Tuscaloosa, AL	7:30 p.m.
11/25/2006	Texas-Southern	Tuscaloosa, AL	6:00 p.m.
11/28/2006	Louisiana Monroe	Tuscaloosa, AL	7:00 p.m.
12/2/2006	Tennessee State	Tuscaloosa, AL	2:30 p.m.
12/9/2006	Alabama State	Tuscaloosa, AL	6:00 p.m.
12/23/2006	Coppin State	Tuscaloosa, AL	2:00 p.m.
12/29/2006	Lipscomb University	Tuscaloosa, AL	7:00 p.m.
1/1/2007	Oklahoma	Tuscaloosa, AL	1:30 p.m.
1/9/2007	LSU	Tuscaloosa, AL	8:00 p.m.
1/20/2007	Georgia	Tuscaloosa, AL	12:30 p.m.
1/27/2007	Arkansas	Tuscaloosa, AL	2:00 p.m.
2/3/2007	South Carolina	Tuscaloosa, AL	2:00 p.m.
2/7/2007	Mississippi State	Tuscaloosa, AL	7:00 p.m.
2/17/2007	Kentucky	Tuscaloosa, AL	2:00 p.m.
2/24/2007	Auburn	Tuscaloosa, AL	4:00 p.m.
2/28/2007	Ole Miss	Tuscaloosa, AL	7:00 p.m.

Dates and times are subject to change, please check your local listings
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